Modi, Muslims and Media

Voices from Narendra Modi's Gujarat

MADHU PURNIMA KISHWAR

Introduced by Salim Khan
Foreword by Cho Ramaswamy



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Cover photo: Narendra Modi leading Jansampark Yatra during Rajkot Municipal Corporation election, 2010.

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madhukishwar@manushi.in
madhukishwar@csds.in
Website: www.manushi.in

Dedicated to the people of Gujarat
For gifting to the people of India a new hope
in the midst of deep despair
&
To my parents
For having encouraged me to stand for Truth & Justice,
no matter what the cost.

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Foreword

by

Cho S Ramaswamy

Editor, *Thuglak*

Ever since learning about the remarkable rehabilitation work done by the Gujarat government after the earthquake in 2001, which shattered the lives of thousands of men, women, and children, I had become an admirer of Shri Narendra Modi. After reading Madhu Kishwar's *Modi, Muslims and Media* I have started adoring him. The manner in which the author has gone about talking to officials and people in detail, about the functioning of the Gujarat government under Modi; her visits to various parts of Gujarat to know about the conditions prevailing in the state; her unbiased and masterly analyses of the material she gathered through her tireless work, makes this book almost a thesis.

But unlike an academic thesis, the book makes absorbing reading; apart from being an irrefutable answer to the prejudiced critics of Modi, it is a page-turner too. Even the blinkered antagonists of Modi would have to concede the objectivity of the author, because her assessment of Modi and his governance is based not on her own opinion, but on the perception of the scores of diverse people whom she met.

How did Modi come to grips with the administration of a state? How did he manage the after-effects of a devastating earthquake even as he took charge of the administration? How does he manage to provide 24x7 electricity to all of Gujarat? How did he accomplish the participation of the people in many of his schemes? How did he improve the agricultural produce of state several times over? How did his administration come to be known as one that puts technology to effective use? How is it that while he is painted communal by the media and some political parties, the Muslims of Gujarat look to him as a friend and a deliverer!

These and such other questions may agitate the minds of even supporters of Modi. This book answers them all. From the moment the reader is introduced to Zafar Sareshwala, the book becomes unputdownable. When Modi tells Zafar, 'you are mine. Among the five crore Gujaratis, you are included. When I bring Narmada water into Sabarmati river, do I stop it from flowing through the Muslim settlement of Juhapura? Who are the biggest beneficiaries of Sabarmati waters near Nehru Bridge?' The reader realises that he is about to join a journey which would lead him

to a view point from where he could witness the majestic flow of facts and truths that would annihilate all the false propaganda that has been unleashed against Modi and his model of governance.

Madhu Kishwar's work should convince any objective reader about the dishonesty behind the anti-Modi propaganda that has been let loose on our society. He is the man of the hour; and that is the clear message delivered most effectively by Madhu Kishwar. The messenger deserves the gratitude of all truth loving people who want to understand Narendra Modi and his mission.

Introduction

by
Salim Khan
Script writer & columnist

In recent times, media trials have become more important than trials in courts. Our objectivity has given way to systematic undermining of facts. It took us about five thousand years to create diverse and deeply profound versions of the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayana*, but in our present era, dubious versions of each contemporary tragedy, or farce, are ready within minutes. Truth, at various levels, has been the first casualty of the media. Infact, reality gets distorted so rapidly that it becomes unrecognizable.

As a film person, I have a special fondness for Rashomon. In this classic film of Japanese director Kurosawa, four persons claim to be a witness to the same murder. But each one has a thoroughly different version of what happened-each version is at total variance with those of the others. The film doesn't privilege any one version and leaves the viewer to decide for her or himself which one, if any, appears most convincing. I believe that hearing multiple versions of a story is always an enriching experience—both emotionally and intellectually.

However, in recent years, our politics and public life have become so polarised that people are not allowed to hear diverse voices. This is especially true with regard to Narendra Modi–who has emerged as one of the most controversial figures of our times. On the one hand are those millions who admire him passionately and see in him a savior of India who has the ability to rid the country's polity of crime and corruption and lead it towards a bright future.

On the other hand are those who project him as the biggest threat to India's minorities, as well as its democratic and "secular" fabric. The main evidence provided by those who see Modi as a scourge for India are the 2002 Gujarat riots. Their version, which presents Modi as a Hitlerian mass murderer, has come to dominate political discourse. Those who have convinced themselves of this "truth" are not willing to change their opinion even after the Special Investigative Team, (SIT) appointed and monitored by the Supreme Court, has given Modi a clean chit which has also been endorsed by lower courts.

The value of Madhu Kishwar's book *Modi, Muslims and Media* lies in the fact that she has taken the trouble to actually study Modi's tenure as

the chief minister of Gujarat and gathered a wealth of evidence to show that the demonisation of Modi is altogether unjustified.

This book gives objective facts back their proper central place in our political life. Madhu visited Gujarat many times in the course of her study of post-2002 Gujarat, and worked very hard to collect accurate material for this well-researched book. She is a renowned investigative journalist; her evidence is painstaking, it deserves close examination. The enormous amount of important research that went into this effort demands that all those who care about the well-being of India's people and healthy inter-community relations should read it carefully and weigh its conclusions fairly.

Her book builds the case, on the basis of verifiable evidence and facts thus far brushed under the political carpet, that far from being guilty of engineering the 2002 riots, Modi in fact worked to bridge communal divides which had been assiduously cultivated by previous regimes through politically-instigated riots. She describes in concrete detail with easily-verifiable facts, the swift and unbiased actions Modi took to end the riots. She describes how in a state that has had so many riots during earlier regimes, Modi managed to cleanse Gujarat of communal violence. He is the first chief minister of Gujarat to have given the state a totally riot free decade after 2002.

Reading Kishwar's account, one wonders why the media never told us that Modi won his first election from Rajkot in February 2002, (just a couple of days before the Godhra incident) with huge support from the Muslim community.

One wonders why we were misled into believing that Modi's agenda was to convert Gujarat into a laboratory for devising ways to crush Muslims when the evidence put together by Kishwar clearly shows that, from the very start of his tenure, Modi prioritised an inclusive development agenda, a prime example of which was his plan for the reconstruction of Kutch after the devastating earthquake.

Thus far, we have heard the voices of those who, in condemning Modi, claim to speak on behalf of Gujarati Muslims. The value of Kishwar's narrative is that she has let Muslims speak for themselves by quoting extensively from her video-recorded interviews with both rural and urban Muslims.

Therefore, this is not just another Rashomon story. It actually reveals how a systematic misinformation campaign took form and shape to

project a totally misleading picture of the 2002 riots and the status of Muslims in Gujarat.

At times I feel that my beloved India is being displayed on a large 70mm screen with seats given to the audience from which to watch the 3-D effect–but some people have gotten used to watching the screen with their glasses manufactured out of fear and clouded with prejudices. Kishwar's book serves to remove the distorted glasses and instead offers a pair of clear spectacles with which to watch the great film unfolding itself on the wide screen of the nation. The film's ultimate success will depend on its total impact, on replacing distortions with the facts. When I was climbing down the staircase of the theatre after watching Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi,* I felt that after seeing the film, I was a better human being. The film that is being screened via this book in some ways has a similar impact on me.

Kishwar speaks from the heart; that is one reason why her readers are likely to find it honest. Modi's words and deeds, as reported in this book, have great force and integrity and are relevant to the political challenges facing our country.

This book does not claim to be the final truth. But it presents evidence that we cannot afford to ignore, especially since the meticulous work done by the SIT supports Kishwar's facts and conclusions.

I sincerely hope Kishwar's work will motivate people to look afresh at Narendra Modi's regime in Gujarat and undertake more in-depth studies of the State. An honest understanding of this phase of contemporary history is vital for the health of democracy and amicable inter-community relations in India.

CHAPTER 1

Why I Felt Impelled to Undertake Study of Post-2002 Gujarat

Does anyone remember who the chief minister of Maharashtra was during Mumbai riots, which were no less deadly than the Gujarat riots of 2002? Does anyone recall the name of the chief minister of UP during the Malliana and Meerut riots or who the Bihar CM was when the Bhagalpur or Jamshedpur riots under Congress regimes took place...How come Narendra Modi has been singled out as the devil incarnate, as if he personally carried out all the killings during the riots of 2002?
Salim Khan in personal interview, 2013

The political discourse in India is so vitiated by Modi phobia that even if one expresses appreciation of the quality of roads in rural Gujarat or the 24x7 power supply in the state's villages and towns, one is branded a 'supporter of fascism.' It is politically fashionable to defend Kashmiri secessionists, press for peaceful engagement with the Pakistani establishment, which sends terror brigades to India, and project murderous Maoists as saviours of the poor. But, to say a word in appreciation of governance reforms in Gujarat, or to credit Modi for having given Gujarat its first ever riot-free 12 years since independence, is to commit political hara-kiri—one is forever tainted and tarred with the colours of fascism. This intellectual terror created by the anti-Modi brigade pushed me to find out for myself the reason behind this obsessive anxiety about Modi.

When violent riots convulsed some pockets of Gujarat in February 2002, I too accepted the version presented by the national media and our activist friends, and assumed that Modi was complicit in the post-Godhra riots of 2002. Therefore, I too signed statements against Modi, and published articles, submitted to Manushi, that indicted the Gujarat government. We also raised funds for the riot victims.

However, barring a brief mention in an article analysing the defeat of NDA in 2004, I refrained from writing anything in my name because I did not get the time to visit Gujarat and experience and assess the situation first-hand. My earlier experiences of covering various riots as well as conflict situations in Kashmir and Punjab had taught me that media reports cannot be trusted enough to take a definitive stand on such issues without personal verification. This is because media reports are often coloured by the ideological prism used by the writer. Therefore, I refrained from making common cause with anti-Modi campaigners.

I spent a lot of time covering major riots—including the 1984 massacre of Sikhs, a series of riots in Meerut and Malliana in the 1980s, Bombay in 1993, and Jammu in 1989. In addition I had also closely studied several others like Biharsharif, Bhiwandi, Jamshedpur, and a series of riots in Ahmedabad, Surat, etc. Based on my experience of covering these riots, I knew that barring the 1984 Delhi riots, which was the Congress Party's solo performance, almost all the other riots saw the complicity of both the BJP and the Congress. Even in the communal polarisation that followed the Babri Masjid demolition, the Congress Party had been an equal partner in crime with the BJP. This dubious role of the Congress Party, which was at total variance with the ideological grounding of the grand old party crafted by Mahatma Gandhi, played an important role in marginalising the Congress in large parts of India. Knowledgeable Gujaratis had revealed in private conversations that, even in 2002, a section of Congressmen avidly joined, and even instigated, riotous mobs just as sections of the BJP, VHP, and RSS were egging on frenzied mobs to murder, arson and loot. Therefore, when the BJP in general, and Modi in particular, began to be singled out for attacks and demonised, one felt an instinctive uneasiness about the Hate-and-Oust Modi Campaign. This uneasiness grew as it became obvious, over the years, that almost all the NGOs, activists, journalists, and academics involved in Modi's demonisation enjoyed active patronage of the Congress Party. In fact, most of them were getting huge financial support for this purpose.

During the anti-Sikh massacre of 1984 in North India, the slogan of those of us who worked with the victims and documented the unprecedented massacre was 'Punish the Guilty', though the complicity of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Home Minister Narasimha Rao, and the Lt. Governor of Delhi was brazen. Nevertheless, neither the PM, nor the Home Minister, or the Lt. Governor were personally demonised. But, in

the case of the Gujarat riots of 2002, the entire discourse came to centre round just one man.

During the course of an interview with me, film scriptwriter Salim Khan made an interesting comment:

> Does anyone remember who the chief minister of Maharashtra was during Mumbai riots, which were no less deadly than the Gujarat riots of 2002? Does anyone recall the name of the chief minister of UP during the Malliana and Meerut riots or who the Bihar CM was when the Bhagalpur or Jamshedpur riots under Congress regimes took place? Do we hear the names of earlier chief ministers of Gujarat under whose charge hundreds of riots took place in post-Independence India? Some of these riots were far more deadly than the 2002 outburst. The state used to explode into violence every second month. Does anyone remember who was in-charge of Delhi's security when the 1984 massacre of Sikhs took place in the capital of India? How come Narendra Modi has been singled out as the devil incarnate, as if he personally carried out all the killings during the riots of 2002?

Why just distant riots, there is wilful amnesia about the fate of hundreds of thousands of Bodos and Muslims who were uprooted from their villages in July 2012 because their homes were torched and destroyed. As of August 8, 2012, over 4,00,000 people were still reportedly taking shelter in 270 relief camps, after being displaced from almost 400 villages. By all accounts, these refugee camps provided the most sub-human living conditions. The Assam chief minister delayed deployment of the army by four days even though a large number of army units are stationed right there in Assam. Those riots have been erased out of memory only because they happened during Congress regimes. This is not to justify the 2002 riots or suggest that they be pushed into oblivion simply because others have been shoved under the political carpet. This is only to plead for non-partisan treatment of all such crimes.

I found it disturbing that almost all of those who have led the 'Hate Modi' campaign are neither Muslim nor residents of Gujarat. Teesta Setalvad, Shabana Azmi, and Javed Akhtar are from Mumbai while Shabnam Hashmi, Prashant Bhushan, and Harsh Mander are based in Delhi. Four of the most prominent figures of anti-Modi brigade from within Gujarat—Mallika Sarabhai, Aakar Patel, Ami Yagnik and Achyut Yagnik—are not Muslims. Whenever a Gujarati Muslim has tried to speak

in a different voice, he has been attacked viciously and made to pay such a heavy price that people just shut up in terror.

The eminent Muslim scholar, Maulana Vastanvi was forced to resign as vice chancellor of Deoband University simply because he shared the thought that Gujarati Muslims had benefited from the inclusive development policies of Modi's government. Shahid Siddiqui, the editor of Urdu daily, *Nai Duniya*, faced severe attack and abuse for simply doing an interview with Modi in which Modi defends himself against various charges leveled against his government. Siddiqui had asked him all the stereotypical questions hurled by anti-Modi groups and was in no way soft towards Modi. Yet, he was vilified for simply allowing Modi newspaper space to state his version, so much so that he was expelled from Samajwadi Party. It is not surprising that Siddiqui fell in line within no time and began mouthing anti-Modi rhetoric. What kind of journalism do the self-appointed defenders of minority rights want to promote in India that does not give a journalist the right to interview a thrice-elected chief minister simply because the Congress and the Left parties feel threatened by him?

Likewise, Amitabh Bachchan was attacked viciously for merely doing an ad campaign for Gujarat's tourism department. If the Congress Party proxies like Teesta Setalvad, Shabana Azmi, and Shabnam Hashmi had their way, they would have wanted economic and political sanctions against Gujarat of the kind faced by South Africa during the apartheid regime. Without declaring an open war against the State government, the UPA government at the Centre has treated the Gujarat government under Modi with more lethal hostility than ever displayed towards Pakistan even after repeated attacks by Pakistan-trained terrorists. The Congress-led government has tried its best to crush Gujarat economically by stalling its development programs through many devious means. Some of this will be covered in my subsequent book.

The political discourse in India is so vitiated by Modiphobia that even if one expresses appreciation of the quality of roads in rural Gujarat or the 24x7 power supply in the state's villages and towns, one is branded a "supporter of fascism." It is politically fashionable to defend Kashmiri secessionists, press for peaceful engagement with the Pakistani establishment which sends terror brigades to India, and project murderous Maoists as saviours of the poor. But, to say a word in appreciation of governance reforms in Gujarat, or to credit Modi for having given Gujarat

its first ever riot-free 12 years since independence, is to commit political hara-kiri—one is forever tainted and tarred with the colours of fascism.

This intellectual terror created by the anti-Modi brigade pushed me to find out for myself the reason behind this obsessive anxiety about Modi. Why do "secularists" hate to be reminded that Gujarat has been riot-free since 2002? Why don't they ever acknowledge and document what made Gujarat—a state that witnessed hundreds of riots in post-Independence years leading to deep mutual estrangement between Hindus and Muslims—experience its first communally peaceful decade under Modi's rule? Why are Gujarati Muslims not allowed to speak for themselves?

Since 2001, the anti-Modi campaign has centered round the following charges, which are used as proven facts even when the ground reality or the court judgments do not sustain them:

- Modi is inherently anti-Muslim and anti-Christian because he belongs to the BJP, and was nurtured by the RSS.
- Modi allowed Muslims to be massacred in order to consolidate the Hindu vote bank; that he has never shown any remorse for the same and has never apologised for his alleged role in the riots.
- Religious minorities live in terror under Modi's regime as second- or third-class citizens because that is allegedly the intrinsic agenda of Hindutva.
- Muslims are being ghettoised and impoverished through discriminatory state action.
- A section of Muslims have begun voting for Modi because of fear of reprisals by Hindutva forces.

Whenever Modi has been questioned as to why he has refused to apologise for his alleged role in the riots, he has always stood his ground and said, "If I'm really guilty of the crimes you attribute to me, then a mere apology is not the appropriate response. I should be publicly hanged for it so that I become an object lesson for all others and no one dares commit such crimes again." This response, in the face of numerous ongoing cases in court, as well as inquiries by the Special Investigative Team (SIT), which was appointed and monitored by the Supreme Court, indicates tremendous self-confidence. This is usually a sign of firm conviction about one's innocence. However, nobody in the media or among our academia was willing to give him as much as benefit of doubt as they generously give to known terrorists.

In our jurisprudence, everyone is assumed innocent until proven guilty. But, in the case of Narendra Modi, the media, all Left-leaning intellectuals, and all the anti-BJP NGOs and political parties, including those that have big massacres and crimes to their credit, were not willing to even wait for the verdict of courts and inquiry commissions. It was as though with one mind, they had their verdict ready—that Modi was guilty of having engineered the riots. The very same human rights activists who fight for the rights of even known terrorists to a fair trial, declared Modi a mass murderer before any trial even began. As Modi began getting clean chits by courts, they attacked the concerned judges and moved higher courts. When even the Supreme Court-appointed SIT exonerated Modi on all charges, the anti-Modi lobby insisted that the SIT report be junked and another inquiry set up afresh. This single-minded obsession with punishing Modi, and not being satisfied with the fact that many of those actually found guilty were already being sent to jail, puzzled me no end. Therefore, I decided to undertake this study to figure out the source of this obsession.

Questions that Triggered My Curiousity

- What is unique about the Gujarat riots and about Modi that certain political groups have made it a 'do or die' mission to pillory this man, no matter what the actual verdicts of courts and inquiry commissions?
- What was Modi's personal role during those riots?
- What do the Muslims of Gujarat have to say about those riots?
- If Modi's critics are right about Gujarat being a deeply communalised society with Muslims living as a terrorised minority, how is it that the state has not witnessed even a single riot since 2002?
- Why is the percentage of Muslims voting for Modi increasing with every election?
- How come hundreds of Muslims have won panchayat, zila parishad, and municipal elections on BJP tickets?
- How valid is Modi's claim that his Gujarat development model is 'inclusive?' Why do his critics reject it as 'pro-corporate and anti-poor,' 'pro-elite and anti-farmer' as well as 'majoritarian and anti-minorities?' I looked closely at how the hitherto excluded or marginalised populations—small farmers, tribals, Dalits, Muslims, Christians—view Modi's government. Has his government facilitated inclusion and upward mobility for them or are they being further marginalised?

My study of Gujarat also covers the nature of governance reforms, including police reforms since they are supposed to be intrinsic to his economic development model. However, this volume confines itself to:

- The vision and agenda announced by Modi on assuming office in October 2001 and how far he delivered on his promises;
- The model of governance he established during the reconstruction of earthquake ravished Kutch;
- The processes and reforms he set into motion within the first few months of assuming office;
- An account of Godhra and post-Godhra riots, as established by various inquiry commissions and the Supreme Court-appointed SIT;
- Modi's relationship with the Muslim community in the words of Muslims themselves;
- The role of media in projecting a partisan and misleading version of Gujarat riots and subsequent developments.

As I started with this study, I decided to avoid meeting or talking to Narendra Modi, till such time as I got a good grasp of the ground reality. I opted to first get to know him through his work at the ground level. Hence, I travelled to several villages and towns of Gujarat and met a whole range of people, which included farmers (including in tribal districts), fishermen, artisans, school teachers, village-level health workers, doctors, panchayat representatives, municipal counsellors, political party activists, MLAs of both the Congress and the BJP, government officials, professors, writers, journalists, small entrepreneurs, street vendors, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, hoteliers, and restaurant owners, urban housewives, and general people on the streets. I made a special effort to reach out to Muslims, both in rural and in urban areas. I also met several Christians, especially those running missionary schools.

The entire range of persons I interviewed for this book, and the following volume, are those whom I met for the first time. Since I had no prior interaction with them, I could not have predicted what they were going to share with me. Most of the meetings were fixed impromptu after, or just a couple of hours before I arrived at a particular village or town. Therefore, they also did not know what questions I was going to ask of them. I avoided meeting people I knew from before because I already knew their views and did not expect any new information to come from them.

Some of the most insightful accounts have come from officials who have worked closely with Narendra Modi over the years. They include several

senior and junior IAS officers, police officials, as well as local government officials at the district level. Equally important are the accounts of Congress and BJP politicians—in villages, towns, and big cities. In addition, I talked to some BJP ministers and MLAs to get a glimpse into Modi's relationship with his Cabinet and party colleagues. All this helped me get a good glimpse into Modi's work style, his communication skills, personality traits, and personal relations with those he interacts with on a regular basis. They provide fascinating insights into his administrative style and organisational acumen. I have also relied on reports of various commissions, committees, various court orders and judgements, as well as the report of the Supreme Court-appointed SIT set up to inquire into Godhra carnage and the post-Godhra riots.

I met NaMo (commonly used appellation for Modi using first two letters of his name and surname) for a series of interviews nearly six months after I began my study of Gujarat and had already gotten a good idea of his persona. I talked to him for over 15 hours spread over six sessions. Most of my conversations with Modi were video-recorded. For the rest, I took careful notes. In many of the chapters, I have quoted extensively from his recorded conversations.

Since much of this information was springing daily surprises at me, I video-recorded my conversations with hundreds of people so that I did not omit details and nuances of what I was being told. Barring some IAS officers who did not want to be video-recorded, almost all others readily agreed to speak on camera. My assistants transcribed all the video-recorded interviews verbatim. Apart from senior officials and a few others, most people I interviewed spoke to me in Hindustani tinged with some Gujarati. I took the trouble to personally translate each interview into English so that inaccuracies don't creep in inadvertently. This cumbersome process has unfortunately delayed the publication of this and subsequent books because I was myself overwhelmed by the richness of material, which ran into thousands of pages.

However, I felt this lengthy process was necessary because I did not want this to be a book about my impressions of Modi. I wanted this to be an account of what I learnt about him through diverse people of Gujarat. I wanted those voices to be heard directly without intrusive intervention on my part. This is important because given the systematic demonisation of Modi by leading intellectuals, academics, media persons, and NGOs, many people find it difficult to believe any account that does not paint him

in devilish light. I believe these ground-level experiences and statements deserve to be taken seriously. My appeal to all those who care for the truth and have no vested interest in hating Modi is, please listen to these voices carefully. To all those well-meaning people who have caught the anti-Modi virus simply because it is in the air, I can only say: I am sharing with you factual accounts by people who are talking on the basis of lived experience. They are providing concrete evidence of why they find the demonisation of Modi unacceptable. Since they are identified by name and place, please take the trouble to double-check for yourself, if in doubt.

I am well aware that many will dismiss this book as a hagiographical account of Modi's term as CM. To them I can only say, for 12 long years you have swallowed uncritically poisonous propaganda against him based on statements and testimonies which are being proven motivated, cooked-up, and plain false by courts and the SIT team. Let this come as a necessary antidote to that malicious smear campaign. I assure you that, unlike most of Teesta Setalvad's witnesses, none of the people who spoke to me used tutored language. All of them spoke spontaneously on video. Unlike Teesta's many witnesses, none of these people are likely to disown what they told me.

To those who have made a religion out of hating Modi, I can only plead and say: Please challenge me on facts instead of countering me with ideological attacks. I am very willing to be corrected, if better counter-facts are brought to my notice.

CHAPTER 2

The Modi Myth Created by 'Conflict Entrepreneurs'

Gujarati Muslims Speak for Themselves

Muslims don't have to vote for us but they should at least get their work done from the government.
Narendra Modi to a delegation of Muslims in 2003

Maheshbhai, you want to come with five Muslims, or 50, 500, or 5,000—pick a venue of your choice. I am ready to meet all of you. I am ready to solve all the problems...I want you to know that I am available.
Narendra Modi to Mahesh Bhatt, film director & producer, in 2004

Unfortunately, some conflict entrepreneurs live off conflicts. It's like the war industries would cease to exist if human hatred evaporated. They have a tremendous investment in this hatred, so to keep the demon alive is to keep their God alive. They draw sustenance from this hatred.
Mahesh Bhatt in personal interview 2013

My first visit to Gujarat for a study of post 2002 Gujarat coincided with the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in January 2013. It turned out to be a very different event from the stereotypical image I had imbibed from the media and critics of Modi in academia. At the summit, a chance meeting with Zafar Sareshwala, an Ahmedabad-based Muslim businessman, introduced me to an altogether different perspective on Narendra Modi and his model of governance in Gujarat—all based on Zafar's first-hand experience of Modi and his policies.

By contrast, the demonic image of Modi popularised by the Hate Modi Brigade has been created by people who have never exchanged even ten sentences with Modi, leave alone engaged with him in a serious manner. Zafar Sareshwala was among those who led an international

campaign against Modi after the 2002 riots. He became a celebrity when he announced his intention to take Modi to the International Court of Justice. However, very soon he decided to change track.

Zafar started the process of engagement with Modi despite the fact that his own family suffered huge losses in the riots of 2002. Their factory was totally gutted. The building in which his family owned flats was also attacked and set fire to. They had also suffered similar losses in numerous earlier riots in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s—every time their business establishment was burnt down, they had to start afresh.

I had heard small sound bytes of Zafar on TV debates on Gujarat in the previous months. But since our TV anchors are committed to proving Modi a fascist butcher, they rarely allowed Zafar to finish his sentences. It often appeared as if he was being brought in as a token voice to make the Hate Modi Campaign appear more "balanced".

My video-recorded conversations with Zafar Sareshwala run into several hours over several meetings. During my subsequent travels to different regions of Gujarat, I followed leads given by Zafar to double-check facts for myself and found no discrepancy between what Zafar told me and what I saw and heard on the ground. Zafar's own background is also noteworthy:

> I belong to the Sunni Bohra community, which migrated from Saudi Arabia about 250 years back. Sunni Bohras are not to be confused with Daudi Bohras, who constitute a very small and insignificant part of the Muslim population. By contrast, Sunni Bohras are a huge community of orthodox and puritan Muslims spread all over Gujarat. We are successful as small and medium entrepreneurs. Most of the madrasas in Gujarat are run by the Sunni Bohras. Islamic scholar Maulana Vastanwi is also a Sunni Bohra. People only talk of Deoband, but there is an equally old madrasa of Sunni Bohras in Dabhel, which was set up more than 100 years back.
>
> Despite being orthodox in religious matters, we are highly educated as a community. My physical appearance and "image" is that of a stereotypical Muslim. I have a beard, my wife wears a burkha, we pray five times a day, we've done Haj, and we follow every Islamic tradition. But our views are enlightened precisely because we take the teachings of Islam seriously.
>
> People who go on and on about the 2002 riots, choose to forget that it was the culmination of an endless series of riots. The worst riots in post-partition India happened in 1969 in Ahmedabad; more than 5,000 Muslims were killed in that massacre. But because there was no 24x7 media, riots in those days

went largely undocumented, so no one outside got to know of the 1969 riots. It was a small incident involving a cow but it led to a shocking outburst. At that time, Congress Party's Hitendrabhai Desai was the chief minister while Indira Gandhi was in power at the Centre. During the 1969 riots, our office, factory, everything was burnt down. There is an area called Kalupur, which is the heart of a Muslim neighbourhood. In that locality, right opposite the police station on Relief Road, there is a mosque and several Muslim shops. All of these shops were burnt down. I still remember, I was five years old at that time, when Mrs. Gandhi visited the riot-affected area and inspected that spot. I witnessed the scene with my grandfather when Indira Gandhi got down from her car and said, "How on earth did it happen that a mere 40 meters from a police station, a mosque and Muslim shops are set on fire?"

Forget about punishment, not even a single charge sheet was filed after that massacre. The Jagmohan Commission report is there for everyone to see. Entire communities were wiped out, without a trace. Why are people not talking about those victims? Has anyone documented what happened to those 5,000 families?

Another major riot took place in 1985 preceded by several smaller ones. It went on for months on end. Again, our factory and our house were set on fire. In 1985, Madhavji Solanki of Congress Party was in power in Gujarat and Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre. Between 1985 and 2002, people came to expect that after every 2-3 months there would inevitably be a riot. At one time, the curfew lasted 200 days.

During the 1987 riots also, Amar Singh Chaudhury of the Congress Party was the CM. This was followed by riots in 1990. At that time too, Congress Party's Chimanbhai Patel was the chief minister. Again, our factory was burnt down. In 1992 also, it was set on fire. Chimanbhai Patel was the chief minister even at that time.

Every anti-Dalit riot was also converted into an anti-Muslim riot whether in 1981 or in 1985. In every riot, our office and factory were burnt down and we were subjected to great indignities because the police would not even register an FIR. This was followed by humiliation by the insurance companies. I remember, in 1992, my business was in full bloom. But our entire factory was reduced to ashes. We had an insurance of Rs 1.5 crores but the insurance company gave us a cheque for only Rs. 9 lakhs. Has anyone documented how Muslims pick up the threads after each such tragedy?

The truth is that while the earlier governments remained indifferent; after each riot, the Hindus themselves helped the rehabilitation of Muslims. I always

say that if the Gujarati Hindus were 100 per cent communal, the Muslims would have been destroyed long ago. It is because Hindus are not communal that Muslims continue to prosper in Gujarat. All those riots were politically engineered and the Congress Party was the prime culprit.

After the 2002 riots, we were financially wiped out because we were in the stock market. At least 250 families earned their livelihood through me. Our bank guarantee had to be encashed. Narendra Modi does not control the nationalised or private banks that turned down Muslims' requests for loans.

For instance, in order to restart our business after the 2002 riots, I approached ICICI bank and offered to mortgage my house for a loan. At the last minute, the relationship manager told me, "Zafarbhai, the letter 'M' will bite you. There's an unwritten law to refuse loans to 'Ms' who have been put on the negative list." Does Narendra Modi make those lists? Only Muslim areas such as Kalupur and Jamalpur used to come under negative lists. If you had a house there, you were put in the negative list. In the entire Paldi area where the vast majority of residents are Hindu, they only kept Faiz Mohammed Society in the negative list because that's a Muslim colony. They did not give us a loan although we fulfilled all other qualifications.

Even though I was in England at the time of the 2002 riots, I was closely involved with our main family business in Ahmedabad. One felt a sense of despair that there is no one to speak for us. During my time in England, I used to live in Dewsbury. Three Gujarati Muslims from Dewsbury, along with two others, were murdered near Himmat Nagar during those riots. They had gone to visit their ancestral village in Surat district and got caught in the frenzy of that fateful night on February 27. One of them, named Aswal, was my neighbour in England. People were shaken and horrified and we thought it was time to do something. Therefore, we decided to take the Gujarat government to the International Court of Justice. L.K. Advani, who was then the home minister, was due to come to the UK around that time. I filed a case in the London High Court that Advani should not be allowed to enter England just as Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam—an ultra-right wing black movement—was denied entry by the UK.

Since my case was admitted in the London High Court, Mr. Advani went back from Spain because he did not want the embarrassment of having to face hostile demonstrations and negative reports in the international media. Therefore, the case was dismissed, but I had succeeded in making a point.

We then hired a leading British law firm to prepare a case against Modi before the International Court of Justice. That made me an instant hero but

gave me a very uneasy feeling. I asked myself, what are we going to get out of filing this case? Ok, it would come on TV and become a poster boy of the anti-Modi movement. But what is the likely outcome? At that time, even though the *Intefada* movement was at its peak, a peace movement between Palestinians and Israelis was being initiated by the US. In fact, exactly at that point of time, the Palestinians were going to sit down for negotiations with Sharon and Perez and this whole meeting was to be facilitated by George Bush. The Palestinian issue had been dragging on for at least 60 years. But what did they achieve? We were also watching the condition of Muslims in the rest of the world. Muslims had fought wars, and battled everybody. What did they get from it all? I used to feel very disheartened looking at the fate of Palestinians. Three million refugees in Lebanon were living in terribly squalid conditions. Even the slums of Mumbai are heaven compared to those poor Palestinian camps.

If they had entered into negotiations earlier, these three million refugees could have lived settled lives. And who decides what Palestinians or Gujarati Muslims should do? These armchair critics? They are sitting in their plush offices in nine-to-five jobs and drawing seven-figure salaries. All they do is send off emails. It is we who have to live and die in Gujarat and yet these distant guys control our destiny. They don't want to come to India, they don't want to visit Ahmedabad, and they don't care to do anything concrete.

Those years in England it also broke the myth I had cherished about pan-Islamic unity. I used to think Islam is one. But I came to realise Arabs are Arabs and Pakistanis are Pakistanis. Forget Gujarat, even within India, Lukhnow Muslims are Lukhnawi. They don't care if Gujarati Muslims die. The worst was when I realised that if you are an Ahmedabadi, even Surat Muslims will not come to save you.

I used to go from mosque to mosque in England to beg money for the 2002 riots victims telling them that you don't need to give me money. Send it directly to the victims or community NGOs working for them. People need money; we need to build houses. But we got very little help.

My immediate reaction at that point of time was that we should not make beggars of our community. I would tell my brother who was involved in Ahmedabad's relief camps, for God's sake, do something to get these refugee camps closed at the earliest. Don't allow Muslims to become a beggar community.

I could have continued with my cushy life in England. I was running a financial services company. But, when I saw the apathy of Muslims in England, it hit me very badly. Nobody cared about those dead, or those whose dear ones

had died. The rest were happy in their own world. Gujarat had become a topic of drawing room conversations over kebabs. I told myself that we don't want the sympathy of such people. But I had already waged this war against Modi. I could not even return to Gujarat. With that as a backdrop, I thought unless and until we sit down and talk, the problem can't be solved. But who do we begin this dialogue with? Why not Modi himself?

I discussed this with two-three prominent Muslim scholars. At that very time, we came to know that Modi sahib was coming to England on August 17, 2003, in connection with the first Vibrant Gujarat Summit. I thought, let's meet him and ask, you are yourself from Vadnagar where you have lived with Muslims. What is your problem with us? I put forward this idea to some wise Islamic scholars in England. They said, If you want to solve the problem, then it is best to talk to Modi. But remember, you are going to face a lot of flak. I said, Forget all others. What do you think is the right thing to do according to Islam? Guide me on the basis of the *Quran* and *Hadith*.

They recited the tenth *Hadith* to me and read *ayats* from the *Quran* and advised that I should go ahead for a dialogue in the interest of peace. One of them quoted Suleh Hudaybiyyah and asked me, "What is your intent behind this move?" I said, Maulana, in the post-riots situation, Muslims have lost all connection with the administration. We can't live in an environment where we are totally cut off from the administration. We have to run schools, hospitals, and we have madrasas. At every single step, we need the government's help.

These wise maulanas gave me courage to go ahead. Then I asked myself as to how I could meet Modi? I was already notorious for leading the anti-Modi campaign. So, I approached my friend Mahesh Bhatt, a prominent Indian film director and producer, who has also been active on these issues. He had reached Ahmedabad on the very third day of the riots and stood consistently by the Muslim community.

Over the years I have seen that Bhatt sahib is an honest man. So I told him of the new developments and added, that Narendra Modi sahib is coming to England. It is my desire that we meet and talk to him. Bhatt sahib said, "Sure you must meet. All problems finally can only get solved through dialogue. They had World War I and World War II but, ultimately, all decisions were taken on the negotiating table."

I asked him, but how do we meet Modi? He promised to figure out a way to help me. Some days later, Bhatt sahib called back saying, "I've talked to my friend Rajat Sharma, who is very close to Modi. Rajat says you should send him an email stating why you want to meet Modi."

So I sent an email admitting openly that we had fought Modi. But now we feel that we have exhausted all the battle options and realise nothing will come out of it. Therefore, I want to meet Modi and ask him what is his problem with Muslims. Rajat forwarded my email to Modi sahib. I think Modi ji must have looked into my family background and found that we are good people.

Please note that when we asked for a meeting with Modi he was not yet a hero but one of the most hated figures; he was called Milosevic, Hitler, and so on. Now, there is a long line of people waiting to meet Modi sahib and competing with each other to praise him to the skies, but at that time no Muslim was willing to approach him openly.

Soon a meeting was fixed through Rajat. At my insistence, Rajat agreed to fly to London with Modi and be present at that meeting.

We were asked to come and meet him in some hall in Wembley. I replied saying we want to meet him in private. He agreed and called us at 5 p.m. to St. James Court where he was staying. Here we were praying in anxiety about our first meeting with Modi, when bang came the first headline against me: "Zafar Sareshwala takes a U-turn on Modi." The very same people who treated me as a hero earlier, now attacked me furiously.

I said to my critics that if you are so opposed to Modi, then you should have found a way to defeat him in elections. After all, Modi has won the election with a two-third majority. This election was not rigged. You can't defeat him in elections but sit here opposing him? You will not even let others talk to Modi!

All hell broke loose when I issued a statement saying, "We welcome the visit of Narendra Modi, who is the democratically elected chief minister of Gujarat." Suddenly, from a hero, I became a villain. Many of the big shots of England came to dissuade me from meeting Modi. I did not listen to anyone. I told them when the Palestinians can sit down with Sharon, why can't we sit down with Modi? And you cannot call Modi Sharon by any yardstick!

The maulanas supported me saying, "When we can talk to our enemies, why not Modi? He is, after all, our own. We can catch him by the collar (*girehbaan*) because he is one of us." It was the courage of these few maulanas and the guidance from the *Quran* and *Hadith* that gave me the strength to say, Even if 100 crore Muslims are against me, I am not going to give up this path. But I faced hell even before I met Modi and received 1100 hate mails from across the world. I thought this was my jehad.

We were to meet Modi sahib at 5 p.m. on the appointed day. Five minutes before that I received a phone call from Mahesh Bhatt. In his inimitable style, he said: "Zafarbhai, if you cannot look at Modi straight in the eye and say that

there cannot be peace without justice, then don't go for this meeting." I told Bhatt sahib that he is the chief minister of Gujarat. I have no idea whether he will give us two minutes or five. He might just ask me to submit my petition and leave. He said: "OK, we will pray that you get to say it all. Just go." So I, my brother, and a renowned Muslim scholar went to meet Modi. Because I am a businessman, I could absorb the attacks on me by the anti-Modi lobby. But the poor Maulana, oh my God, he was branded as *kaafir. Bahut zaleel kiya unko.* He was humiliated no end!

Since Mahesh Bhatt has been one of the fiercest critics of Modi in the media, I found it hard to believe that he had encouraged Zafarbhai to start the process of engagement with Modi. Therefore, I made a special trip to Mumbai to confirm Zafar's version and also to find out whether Mahesh Bhatt had come to assess Modi differently after the new process of engagement between Modi and the Gujarati Muslim community following Zafar's first meeting in August 2003. Mahesh Bhatt endorsed every word of Zafar's account. This is how Zafar describes his first ever meeting with Modi:

See how Modi met us! He kept track of what time we arrived in the building and came to the elevator to receive us. I was really nervous about the outcome of this meeting. He shook my hand and broke the ice saying in Hindi, "*Aayo yaar*!" Inside, there was a *jhoola* (a stylish swing found in most Gujarati households). He made me sit next to him on the *jhoola*. Because at that time Modi ji used to talk of Gujarati *asmita* (identity), I began the conversation by saying that you are a slightly diluted Gujarati than me. I am an Ahmedabadi and Ahmedabadis by all accounts are the purest of all Gujaratis while you are from Vadnagar. You are comparatively an impure Gujarati. He laughed and said, "Yes, you have a point."

About eight-ten people were present during that meeting, including Rajat Sharma and Talha, my younger brother, who had come all the way from India for the meeting. Talha had seen it all, and he was actively involved in relief work.

We did not beg for any concessions from Modi. We did not say, do this, or do that for us. My first statement to Modi was, You talk of five crore Gujaratis. Are the 60 lakh Muslims included in the five crores? If the answer is 'Yes', then we talk further. But if you say that 'I am the chief minister of only the 4.5 crore Hindus of Gujarat, then there is nothing to say.

He said, "Of course you are mine. Among the five crore Gujaratis, you are definitely included. When I bring Narmada water into Sabarmati River, do I stop it from flowing through the Muslim settlement of Juhapura? Who are the biggest beneficiaries of Sabarmati waters near Nehru Bridge?"

My next statement was: You have come here for Vibrant Gujarat, for the economic progress of Gujarat. But this economic progress will mean nothing without justice. The West rules the world because these countries ensure justice to their citizens. And our country is in a mess—here I am not talking of Muslims alone, because every one of us faces injustice in our country. There cannot be peace without justice.

After that the maulana gave a long sermon to Modi on the value of justice. A very top-notch industrialist from Gujarat who was also sitting there, kept looking at his watch. Modi had some other big programme fixed for that evening. But Modi told him, "Stop looking at your watch. I am going to spend time with these people now." He then told us, "Take all the time you want, and say all that you want to tell me."

Then we began talking of the riots and asked him, What were you doing on the morning of February 27, 2002? Why did you not call your police and the army? Why did you not go to Juhapura? Why did you not visit refugee camps? That day, we confronted Modi with all those questions which the SIT asked him much later. And yet, we were accused of going to meet Modi to curry personal favours with him!

Maulana Isa Mansuri was very tough on Modi, but Modi treated him with great respect. He listened quietly, which we had least expected from the "*Hindu Hriday Samrat*" (The Emperor of Hindu Hearts). Maulana said to him, "Modi sahib, forget everything else, help us get justice. If you do that, you will automatically surge ahead. We are not talking of justice only in relation to the Muslims who are only 15 per cent of India's population. Hindus are bigger victims of injustice. Make justice available to all." Maulana literally made Modi stand in the dock. It is Modi's maturity that even after winning the election with a thumping majority, he respectfully listened to all of that.

I told Modi, look, no one can deny that nearly a 1,000 Muslims were killed. Whatever happens between Palanpur and Vapi, between Bharuch and Jamnagar—good or bad—the buck will stop with you. You are our chief minister. Whenever there is a problem, whoever is put in trouble—whether Hindu or Muslim—it is your responsibility. We will always have the right to ask you, why did this happen under your charge?'To this Modi replied, "Yes,

this blot happened during my tenure and I have to wash it off."(*Haan ye mere kaal ka kalank hai, aur mujhe usko dhona hai*).

People told us Modi never says sorry. I tell such people, what is the value of merely saying "sorry" in such matters? If a known mass murderer comes and just apologises to Muslims, should he be forgiven? We have a criminal justice system in this country, which does not accept 'sorry' as an appropriate punishment. What will Narendra Modi's sorry mean to us? We will judge his 'sorry' from his actions on the ground.

After hearing us out with patience, Modi acknowledged that some of our points were valid but many were exaggerations. He described how, in February 2002, he was very new to the administration after being suddenly sent as chief minister in October 2001. He had been in government only four and a half months when the riots broke out. His mandate was to clean up the mess left by the previous government and win the December 2002 elections for the BJP. Then he explained to us all the steps he had taken to put down the riots from February 27 onwards under very challenging circumstances.

We saw his point because in contrast to the 2002 riots, which lasted just three days, the riots during Congress regimes used to go on for months on end. Many of these earlier riots had resulted in a far higher death toll than that of 2002. The police as well as the administration in Gujarat were thoroughly communalised. It was widely known that the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal etc. patronised Hindu dons while the Congress Party patronised Muslim mafias. These organised criminal syndicates functioned with impunity due to political patronage. The coastal belt of Gujarat, in particular, was dominated by mafias which were involved in smuggling gold and other contraband from Dubai.

This was the Gujarat inherited by Modi, a virtual outsider to governance, in October 2001. He was right in saying that by February, he had not acquired real control over the administration. He was saddled with the baggage of previous regimes. We were touched by the fact that he listened very carefully and gave us proper answers. He had all the facts on his fingertips.

We had thus far experienced that Muslims don't get a proper hearing from anyone. After the riots of 1969, of 1985, 1987, and of 1992, no chief minister had listened to us. All those were Congress chief ministers. I remember when after the 1992 riots, a delegation comprising top echelons of Ahmedabad's Muslim community went to meet Narasimha Rao; he made them wait for four days without the slightest thought that they had come in the month of Ramazan. My uncle was part of that delegation. When Rao did not meet the delegation

> on the day of the appointment, my uncle came back saying, "What is the point of meeting a man who does not meet you on the day he has given you time?"
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> Other delegation members kept waiting for four days. On the fourth day, they were given 2 minutes. That was the status of Muslims in the Congress Party! And what kind of Muslims were these? The top echelons of Gujarat society—the Tatas and Birlas of the Muslim community. Ehsan Jafri, who was my father's closest friend for 60 years, had fixed this appointment. Do you think we are not pained at the way Ehsan Jafri was hacked to death on the very first day of the riots? He talked to my father that very morning before he was butchered.

Ehsan Jafri was a former Congress MP of Gujarat. He had joined the Congress of Indira Gandhi in 1960 and was heading the city unit by 1972. In 1977, after the Emergency, when the party was routed in most Indian states, Jafri managed to win the Ahmedabad seat and became a member of parliament in the 6th Lok Sabha. Thereafter, he remained active in the party and held several key organisational posts in the Congress governments in Gujarat. His house was also burnt down in the 1969 riots during Congress rule. To continue with Zafar's story:

> Ehsan Jafri was one of the oldest leaders of the Congress. He was their MLA. But how did the Congress Party treat him? Congress had a lot of power in Gujarat even during BJP regimes. They dominated the Municipal Corporation. The Mayor of Ahmedabad was a Congressman. Why did they not save Ehsan Jafri? Who stopped them? He phoned his party people for help but they didn't go to rescue him. Some Congressmen were in fact part of the mob that killed Jafri.
>
> Coming back to our interaction with Modi, even for a second it did not feel as though we were talking to a chief minister. After explaining his position, Modi said to us, "OK, tell me about the problems of today. Tell me, is there any mosque still under illegal occupation of the Hindus; give me the names of those who have not received compensation. Come to specifics." I said, "Modi sahib, we did not come prepared for this." Modi then took out a paper, wrote down his phone number and said, "Narendra Modi is available for you 24x7—whether you need him at midnight or at 5 a.m. I give you my promise, I will ensure that you get justice."

When I asked Zafar if he made any audio or video recording of that meeting, he said:

> We didn't record anything because we did not think that the meeting would last two-and-a-half hours. We thought we would only get five minutes. Normally, a chief minister or prime minister does not talk to a common man at such length. They only ask them to submit a petition and leave. We spoke with him for two-and-a-half hours; every small detail was discussed.

To cross-check the facts, I met Rajat Sharma editor-in-chief of India TV, a Delhi Hindi news channel. This is how he described the meeting:

> Maulana Isa Mansuri did not let Modi speak for an hour; he spoke in the harshest tones and words. *Unhone to bakayda Modi ki class laga di* (He gave Modi a real dressing down). But Modi did not interrupt any of them for a minute. After they had finished, Modi responded in detail with facts of each case they narrated. He knew each incident in depth and challenged the veracity of many of the alleged atrocities while conceding several lapses where government failed to reach help. Then he told the Maulana, "You know very well, I had been chief minister only for four-and-a-half months. When this happened, I had no experience of administration. I had not even been an MLA till then. Therefore, I did not have full grip over the administration. But think of the number of Hindus that got killed in police firing. Count the number of places I sent the army." He convinced them that government investigations had found several gory stories, such as that of a pregnant woman's womb being ripped open, to be an outrageous exaggeration. He also narrated how many relief camps he visited, and how he helped Muslims in rehabilitation.
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> The maulana then said, "If this is all true, why don't you say it openly?" Modi replied, "You will not see me fail you in action. But don't ask me to say it openly. VHP types will wipe me out. Elections are right round the corner."

Rajat Sharma also described incidents involving certain madrasas and Muslim housing complexes, which corroborated Modi's claim that he had responded promptly to all calls for help. I cross-checked some of these incidents with people in Gujarat and with other sources. Each one was corroborated by knowledgeable people. Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, who is one of the most prominent Muslim leaders of the BJP, described one such incident:

> There is a madrasa near Chhota Udaipur run by Ghulam Vastanvi's educational trust. During the 2002 riots, this madrasa was surrounded by a riotous mob. About 400 students were trapped inside the madrasa. Some Muslims of the area phoned me since I was a minister in the Vajpayee cabinet. I, at once, informed Narendra Modi about the imminent danger to the lives of all those students, and requested quick action. In this, as well as in all other such cases, Narendrabhai fully cooperated. But the news that came out was all negative. They talked of killings but made no mention of all those who were saved due to Modi's timely interventions.
>
> Why have there been no convictions of those who carried out massacres in Moradabad, Bhagalpur, Meerut, and numerous other places? During the regime of Nehru, India witnessed the maximum number of riots. There were terrible riots during the rule of Indira Gandhi and even Rajiv Gandhi. Gujarat was riot-prone even before independence. But they made it out as if riots during Modi regime were communal and all others in Congress regime "secular".

Hearing the account of Shahnawaz Hussain, I recalled an incident narrated to me in 2003 by Najma Heptullah about approaching Modi during the Gujarat riots. At the time, she was the deputy chairperson of Rajya Sabha as a Congress member. She is the grand-niece of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a prominent Indian freedom fighter, a close colleague of Mahatma Gandhi, and a strong proponent of united India. Azad was the first Education Minister after the independence. Heptullah joined the BJP in 2004. I phoned and reconfirmed the following account in February 2013:

> At the height of riots, I got a phone call from Aga Khan's office that a colony of Khoja Muslims, in the midst of Hindu areas, feared attacks. I phoned Advani ji who was then the home minister in Vajpayee's NDA government. Advani ji in turn talked to Modi. Within minutes, Narendra Modi called me and said, "Najmaben, please don't worry. I will personally oversee this and ensure their safety."
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> And true to his word, Modi immediately sent the army to protect that colony and no harm came to it. Local Muslims told me that since it was on all sides surrounded by Hindu neighbourhoods, if riotous mobs had actually managed to attack this area called Kankadiya, there was no way it could escape being another Naroda Patia. My experience was that Modi personally attended to whatever complaint was brought to his notice very expeditiously. Modi has

helped the Bohras and Khojas a great deal. He even went to meet the Syedna, the leader of Dawoodi Bohras, on his 100th birthday. When the Aga Khan came, he came to personally thank me and perhaps even met Modi. That is when I realised that Muslims will find a respectable space only in the BJP. I asked Modi during the 2007 election whether he wanted me to come and campaign for him. He said, "There is no need for you to come to Gujarat. Since you know my attitude, do what you can from Delhi itself."

To continue with Zafar's story:

We took Modi's phone number and the matter ended there on that day. After about two months, in October, I called Modi sahib's office from London and gave my name and number to his office. Within three hours, I received a call with Mr. Modi on the line. I couldn't believe it because I had never heard of a chief minister who receives or responds to phone calls from the ordinary citizens and that too with such speed.

He said, "*Arre*, you took so long to remember me! We met in August; it is October now." I said I was just checking see if he would actually respond to my call and talk to me. He said, "Tell me, when are you coming back?" I replied, Modi sahib, there is a problem. Since I created so much ruckus against you (*humne aapki pehle jo band bajayi thhi*), your police must be ready to handcuff me on arrival. If I get locked up, you are not going to come and save me! He repeated, "Tell me when you plan to come?" I gave him the date and he made full arrangements for my safe return to Ahmedabad when I landed in India in November 2003. A Gujarat government official received me at Mumbai airport to see me through safely.

As soon as he came to know that I had arrived, he got his secretary to call me and find out when I intended to see him. When I went to meet him, he said, "Tell me about specific problems of the Muslim community. Muslims don't have to vote for us but they should at least get their work done from the government."

These were the exact words of Modi. Why should I praise him needlessly? I mentioned a small problem relating to some Muslim doctor in Himmat Nagar. He knew by name the man who was at that time the sarpanch of the area. He asked me to tell my doctor friend to go and meet Ramanbhai. My friend did as he was told, and the person to whom Modi sent him did the required work immediately. Later, Ramanbhai also told the doctor, "You don't have to vote for us but at least come to us for your work, your genuine requirements. After all, I am also your elected representative!"

> I had never before seen a chief minister talk to citizens in this manner. I am not a Tata or a Birla of the Muslim community.

I asked Zafar whether he was the only one to get this open-hearted reception. Have other Muslims been dealt with similarly? Zafar said, "I can cite numerous such instances where Modi responded to the calls of the most ordinary Muslims with similar alacrity.[1] But you will find Mahesh Bhatt's account very revealing. He got a call from Modi within hours of him having publicly attacked Modi in Surat."

Here is an account I heard from Mahesh Bhatt, one of the fiercest critics of Narendra Modi. This is from a video-recorded interview I conducted with Mahesh Bhatt in Mumbai on January 28, 2013. I have made minor editorial changes without compromising the meaning one bit:

> In 2004, I had gone with Mehmood Madni sahib to Surat to make an anti-Narendra Modi speech. There were innumerable problems that the people of Gujarat were facing at that time. There is a *Hadith* of the Prophet, which I had memorised because I loved it. It says, "*Mazloom ho to madad kar, zaalim ho to wo bhi madad kar.*" I asked the Maulana what it means. He explained that the Prophet says, "*Zaalim bhi bhai hai, zaalim ko uske zulm se mukt karaana* is your *farz,* your duty." (Even the tyrant is your brother. Helping him get rid of his tyranny is also your duty). I asked if this was enshrined in the *Hadith* and had the Prophet actually said it. He said, "Yes, everyone will help a *mazloom,* but not a *zaalim* and when the *zaalim* is liberated from his *zulm,* then that is a real breakthrough."
>
> I remember speaking from the Jamaat-e-Islami platform and saying, "*Narendra Modi, sun rahe ho? Jis mazhab ko tum aaye din kehte ho ki ye aatankvadiyon ki ek gangotri hai, uske Rasool ne kya kaha hai.*" (Narendra Modi, are you listening? The religion that you describe as the fountainhead of terrorism, do you know what its founder has said!)

I have checked numerous speeches of Modi and confirmed with several people. Modi has never used offensive words against Islam. This kind

1 I received proof of this from the account of a Bihari Muslim student who was given an appointment with Modi on the basis of a message he posted on Modi's Twitter handle. Read: Sultan Alimuddin, "My Tweet to Narendra Modi," *Manushi*, February 1, 2014, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1750#.Uw3cNPSSxJM.

of vituperative language has been used by the likes of Praveen Togadia and Haren Pandya. Bhatt seems to be saying this under the mistaken assumption that Modi held similar views. To continue with Bhatt's account:

> I recited the *Hadith* with passion, which also harked back to what I had understood of Gandhi. Little did I know that what I would say would result in a phone call! It said, "Mahesh sahib, the chief minister of Gujarat wants to talk to you." I thought it was a prank call because I was overtly at loggerheads with him, so why would he call me? Before I could even recover from that, he came on the line and started talking in Gujarati with me, "*Maheshbhai kem chho?*"(Maheshbhai, how are you?)
>
> I said that I understand Gujarati but cannot speak it. My father was from Gujarat but I never spoke the language. So Modi switched to Hindi and said, "*Suna hai ki aap humse bahut khafa hain*." (I hear that you are very angry with me). I said, yes, there are many problems. The atrocities committed on Muslims in Gujarat have not been redressed. They are running helter-skelter, mourning, and crying.
>
> He heard me out and said, "*Maheshbhai, 5 aaiyye, 50 aaiyye, 500 aaiyye, 5,000 aaiyye, jahan aana hai aaiyye. Main milne ko taiyyar hoon. Main aapki saari problems ko solve karne ke liye taiyyar hoon. Main aapko yehi kehna chahta hoon ki main* available *hoon*." (Maheshbhai, you want to come with five Muslims, or 50, or 500 or 5,000—pick a venue of your choice. I am ready to meet all of you. I am ready to solve all the problems you bring to my notice. I want you to know that I am available).
>
> Don't ask me why I say so, but I felt there was sincerity when Modi said this to me. The heart listens to a voice and knows whether it is sincere, even though it comes from a person who you have taken on in public. I said thank you for saying that. But since I spoke from the platform of Mehboob Madni of Jamiat, I will communicate your message to Mehboobbhai and get back to you. I immediately called Mehmood Madni and said, '*Mehmoodbhai, Hadith ne apna kamal kar dikhkaya hai, lagta hai Rasool ki Hadith jaake zaalim ki chhaati cheer ke nikal gayi hai, kyunki zaalim ne phone kiya hai.* Modi *sahib ka phone aaya thha. Unhone kaha thha ki aap logon ko jahan aana hai aaiye, main aapki saari problems ko solve karne mein* interested *hoon*.' (Mehmoodbhai, looks like the *Hadith* has worked its wonders. It seems Rasool's words pierced through the chest of the tyrant and hit his heart because the tyrant had phoned me. Modi sahib called me and said we could go and meet him whenever and wherever we wanted. He is ready to solve all our problems.)

I personally found this dialogue of Bhatt rather filmy and self-righteous but admire his honesty in narrating the incident truthfully. He continued:

> Madni said, "Very well. We will have a meeting of our Governing Body and discuss this offer." His father was alive at that time. So he said, "I will also talk to my father and get back to you." The fact is he never got back to me.
>
> Even now when Mehmoodbhai and I talk, I say to him that Mehmood *bhai, itihas pe jab main kitaab likhunga to ye to bolna padega ki usne mujhe phone kiya thha, maine aap se kaha thha, aap ne governing board se meeting kari thhi magar aap ne jawab nahi diya*. (When I write my book on the history of this period, I will have to say that Modi had called me, and I told you about his offer. You had a meeting of your governing board but did not get back to me).
>
> He said, "*Haan maine jawab nahi diya. Mere walid ne kaha ki haan baat karni chahiye. Mere jo aas paas ke log thhe, unhone kaha ki ye nahi karna. Iss baat par koi bhi baat karna sahi nahi hoga. Tum unki rajneeti mein mohra ban jayoge*." (Yes, I did not respond. My father had said we should talk. But all those around me said that it will not be right to take Modi's offer. You will become a mere pawn in their politics.)
>
> Even now if I speak to Mehmoodbhai and I ask him why he didn't meet Modi, he will have the same response. That was my first interaction with Narendra Modi.

When I asked Mahesh Bhatt why he himself did not go and meet Modi to tell him about the grievances of Muslims, he said, "I did not meet him because I was not a part of that organisation. It was a rally of the Jamiat." I persisted and said that you knew about the problems of the Muslims; why only Jamiat? You could have gone with XYZ. Bhatt's unconvincing response was, "See, I was not aligned to any group. Teesta's group was self-sufficiently acting on its own. I had chosen to speak from that platform because I had met Mehmoodbhai during the Iraq invasion."

But not being aligned to any Muslim group has never prevented Bhatt from abusing and accusing Modi of heinous crimes on prime time TV. Why did Bhatt not tell this to Teesta Setalvad that Modi is willing to redress all her legitimate grievances? Bhatt replied:

> I told Teesta because she and others had got to know about me helping Zafar to meet Modi. They thought I was responsible for engineering some kind of backdoor peace process. But there was no backdoor; why should there be one?

> The community has a problem. Zafar lives in Gujarat, he knows about the problem, and Modi is the elected representative of his state. Zafar ran from pillar to post; he didn't seem to get help from anybody, so what does he do? He has to open a dialogue process with the government. That was perhaps perceived as some kind of softening of my stand.

I asked him if Teesta can go to the Supreme Court, or to the High Court, why not meet the elected CM? Why did Teesta never try to meet Modi?" Bhatt replied, "I don't know. I'm not so close to Teesta to know that, and I normally don't ask people what they do." When I asked Bhatt why Shabnam Hashmi, who he works very closely with, had not gone and met Modi, when there was an offer that anyone could go with the problems of Muslims, his answer was:

> I don't think she would ever do that because she is convinced that all these are ploys. In fact, when she got to know that Shahid Siddiquibhai was interviewing Modi, she thought we manipulated it. I told her that she was only imagining things. I was not responsible for it

I asked Bhatt why shouldn't journalists interview Modi? When she has a list of grievances on behalf of Muslims and you have let it be known that Modi is willing to solve problems, why does she not go with the list and say, "I'm giving you a list of demands of such and such group of Muslims, show me that you mean well." Why does she not ever do that?

At this point, Asifa Khan of Bharuch, who left the Congress to join the BJP, intervened to say, "Shabnam will never engage with Modi because she is politically associated with the Congress." Mahesh Bhatt defended Shabnam by saying, "I think she has a clear-cut ideology. She will never go to the BJP, just as I'm not close to the BJP ideology."

I said, Maheshbhai, we aren't talking about ideology; we're talking about the Muslim community's legitimate grievances. If you and I were angry at the 1984 riots, it is not as if we were fighting the Congress ideology. We were angry that the Congress leaders led and instigated hired hoodlums to kill innocents. If you murder people, whether you go chanting '*Bharat mata ki jai*' or you shout '*lal salaam*' (red salute of Maoists), killing is killing. Since you allege discrimination against Muslims, why not take a checklist to Modi saying that these are their grievances, show it that you mean well and alleviate these? To this, Bhatt said:

I somehow never asked Shabnam to meet Modi. However, the next time I went to Gujarat was with the Red Cross Society when floods hit the state in 2005. We were looking out for Muslim pockets to find out whether they were getting state support during that natural disaster. I was delighted when Muslim families came up to me and said that they had gotten their due compensation; in fact, they had gotten it earlier than Hindus. I also met Muslims in Baroda who said the same thing. In a way, it kind of takes the wind out of your sails because you are riding on the wind of anger, and then you find out that your anger is based on the memory of 2002. The ground reality had changed. Flood-affected Muslims were given the same rations and monetary support that others got. I remember telling Rajat Sharma, please do tell Mr. Modi that I have personally gone and checked in flood affected regions. In 2002, I saw a complete breakdown of law and order in Ahmedabad, and the Muslims were living in terror. This time, I saw a very hopeful face of Muslims during the natural disaster. They were dealt with compassion and care by the establishment. That gave me hope that the river was changing its course.

Unfortunately, some conflict entrepreneurs live off conflicts. Just as the war industries would cease to exist if human hatred evaporated, conflict entrepreneurs have a tremendous investment in this hatred. To keep the demon alive is to keep their God alive. They draw sustenance from this hatred. Those who talk of secular values need to go back and study the Mahatma because in the pages of the Mahatma, there is no concept of the *kshatru* (enemy).

Of the entire anti-Modi brigade, Mahesh Bhatt is the only one to have acknowledged such facts truthfully. However, even he has not been able to break with his ideological prejudice and continues to attack Modi on TV channels. To continue with Zafar's account:

The charge that Modi hates Muslims, or that he engineered the riots to win elections has been proved to be bunkum by the enquiries of the highest court. Due to decades of recurrent politically-engineered communal riots during previous regimes, Gujarat police and administration were also heavily communalised. And yet, Modi managed to mobilise all the forces he could to restore normalcy within three days.

An important aspect of this riot was that it was not as simple as BJP vs. Muslims or just VHP vs. Muslims. Many Congress workers were equally involved. Some of these workers have also been convicted. I personally know of many Congress workers who took an active part in the riots. Even outside

Ehsan Jafri's house, there were a lot of Congressmen among the murderous mob. Those found guilty of murders in Gulberg Society include Congressmen.

The most notable among Congressmen involved in Jafri's murder is Himmat Singh Patel who was the mayor of Ahmedabad at that time. It is a travesty of justice that he has escaped punishment. Teesta will never name him. In Ahmedabad, there was a very famous mausoleum of Wali Dakhani, who was a renowned poet of the 18th century. This mausoleum, near Subhash Bridge, was desecrated by the rioters along with a mosque in Paldi. At that time, the Congress, with Himmat Singh Patel as the mayor, controlled the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). Overnight, the AMC completely demolished the mausoleum, ran a bulldozer on that land, and built a road on it. While the rioters had merely vandalised it, the AMC completely erased traces of the *mazaar*. Such a hue and cry was raised over Babri Masjid. Wali Dakhani's *mazaar* was no less important. Babri Masjid was in shambles when they tried building a temple over it. But here they ran bulldozers over a popular *mazaar* as well as over the nearby mosque and built a road on top of both.

Muslim delegations went to Mayor Himmat Singh Patel to protest against this and told him, "The riotous mobs only caused some damage. Why did you bulldoze those two sacred structures? We want permission to restore the *mazaar*." His answer was, "I don't want to talk about this." At this, one of our members said, "Then what is the difference between you and the VHP? It would appear as if you are working in unison with them." He said, "You can interpret it any way you like." He had the cheek to tell us that to our faces. Just imagine the arrogance of the Congress! When Muslims took similar complaints to Narendra Modi, the response was altogether different. He redressed each of our grievances with speed.

This Himmat Singh Patel is the blue-eyed boy of Sonia Gandhi. In 2007, whenever Madam Sonia came to Gujarat, he used to be there all around her. For us, he was our *maut ka saudagar* (merchant of death). Muslims were enraged at Sonia Gandhi's proximity to Himmat Singh.

The Congress knows it was complicit in riots. This is the reason why the Congress does not want to mention 2002 in Gujarat but they scream about it only on national television. Even now when there are debates on TV channels, the Congress does not get even one Muslim to represent them while the BJP has four to five credible Muslims from Gujarat to speak for them. It seems the Congress feels that if they let Muslim faces represent them, they would lose votes since they have been banking on the VHP and a section of RSS types to

> help them fight elections. The Congress has been acting as the B team of the VHP in Gujarat.

Rais Khan, who was the right hand man of Teesta Setalvad till 2008, endorsed Zafar's statement by the following account. While Teesta Setalvad, who led the campaign against Modi, lives in Mumbai, Rais Khan was made to stay in Gujarat and send daily reports to Teesta and also mobilise victims to join her anti-Modi campaign. He fell out with her in 2008. In a video-recorded interview he said:

> I had given numerous photographs to Teesta Setalvad of rioting mobs during that period. They clearly showed faces of known party workers and leaders of the Congress Party along with VHP/Bajrang Dal and BJP cadres. Teesta has never released those pictures that implicate Congressmen. Those particular photographs have simply disappeared. She has refused to give me copies of pictures I sent her from ground zero. Likewise, she never mentions or shows pictures of Muslim mobs attacking Hindu homes and business establishments during that period. When I began pointing out to Teesta and Co. that they were presenting a one-sided picture of the riots, and that they studiously avoided talking of attacks on Hindus, the losses they suffered, the thousands that were rendered homeless and sought shelter in relief camps, she let loose a propaganda campaign that I had been bought over by the VHP. She finally threw me out of the organisation without as much as giving me notice or a chance to explain myself. Moreover, Teesta got false affidavits signed on behalf of riot victims. That is why many of the victims have openly distanced themselves from her. Only those Muslims who are on Teesta's payroll are still standing by her. She gives them monthly doles to remain as showpieces of the Gujarat riots and give tutored testimonies. Till 2007, as the ground level worker of Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), I was in-charge of distributing cash to such families—all of which was part of *hawala* money Teesta got from various Muslim countries—bulk of which she kept for herself.

Rais Khan is currently fighting court cases against Teesta Setalvad, and says he has submitted before the judges a great deal of evidence of Teesta committing perjury and misleading the courts. A fuller interview of Rais Khan appears in my next book. To continue with Zafar's account:

Let me provide you yet another example of the difference between Modi and the Congress leaders. When SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) started troubling me a lot, Mahesh Bhatt suggested that I contact Salman Khurshid, as he was not only the Minister for Minority Affairs, but is also a lawyer at the Supreme Court. I told Mahesh Bhatt that I did not want any personal favours. I just wanted to show him my papers. SEBI spells doom for small companies. They harassed me a lot, levelled many false charges against me, and gave me no hearing. The government has made the Minority Affairs Ministry with a clear mandate that if any member of the minority community has any problem, then the first stop should be the Minister for Minority Affairs. Mahesh Bhatt got an appointment for me, and Khurshid told me to come to Delhi on such and such date in the year 2009.

So we went all the way to Delhi from Mumbai to meet him. He made me wait for hours but did not even give me 15 seconds to state my case. All he said was that since the matter was related to the SEBI and the Finance Ministry, he could not do anything about it. I told him that I did not want any favours but as the minister, he could at least listen to my problem. But he refused to even listen to me. Whether your work is done or not is a different issue, at least you deserve to be heard. On the other hand, we have Modi sahib—if you call his office and leave a message, you will receive a call within a few hours. This response system has not failed us for ten years. This is true not just for me but for everyone; the CM's office will ask for your name and number, and Modi will call you back personally. They have a standard procedure for appointments.

After that encounter with Khurshid, I was left wondering about our standing as Muslims in this country. When I, as a person of some stature, get treated like this, imagine the fate of an ordinary Muslim! We know what we want—shut down the Ministry for Minority Affairs; just give us our constitutional rights as ordinary citizens. The problem is that they do not give me my rights as an ordinary citizen and then they create the Ministry for Minority Affairs and give us a 15-point programme, which they have no intention of implementing. My message to the Congress Party is: Just give me my basic rights, as is being done by the Gujarat government; we want no special treatment.

Let me recount another instance of the contrast between how Modi responds to grievances as compared to the high and mighty in the Congress Party. Even while we were assisting in the rehabilitation work and legal cases of Muslims, we decided that while the justice system will do its own work, our main job is to make our community stand on its feet. For that to happen, we have to launch a jehad for education. Till 2001-02, there were only three Muslim

> schools in this city. Today, Ahmedabad alone has 17 Muslim schools as well as several Muslim colleges. There is FD College in Jamalpur, where more than 1,000 girls are studying. My sister-in-law and my sister, run a school in a poor neighbourhood of Shahpur, where more than 650 girls receive education. We want this work to get priority—not simply go on some television channel and abuse Modi and become secular heroes.
>
> As you well know, the license raj is terrible for schools anywhere in India. But in Gujarat, opening schools in Muslim areas has started happening with ease only after Modi took charge. Until some years ago, there was an unwritten law that no permission would be given for opening Muslim schools. Therefore, no Muslim even thought of it. What was the point when, you knew, no matter how hard you tried, no permission would be forthcoming? Now things are different—you get a lot of encouragement from the government if you want to do anything in the sphere of education.
>
> We told Mr. Modi that we needed only two things from him: logistical support and the promise that the administration should not put a spoke in our wheels. For logistical support of the government, approvals are needed. You just cannot start a school wherever you want. Modi has indeed been true to that assurance. The administration is today very responsive towards the educational initiatives of the Muslim community.

Opening schools has been made easy because the Gujarat government has set a transparent rule-based system which eliminates the scope for arbitrary denial of permission. The education department has laid broad guidelines and listed basic requirements to be fulfilled before an application is accepted by the department. All this information is available on the website. Applications have to be submitted online with documentary evidence, such as proof of land ownership and completion of the school building. The Committee that gives sanction gets to see the applications only on the day of the meeting. Those meeting the requirements cannot be denied permission, and those who don't meet the requirements cannot get a license. The department has to put reasons for denial online so as to build in accountability. If anyone still feels aggrieved, he can use the well-crafted SWAGAT (literally meaning 'welcome') system of grievance redressal which provides systemic access and personal hearing by the chief minister. This is what has eliminated the bribe-friendly discriminatory treatment which also allowed communal prejudices to influence decisions. Modi doesn't make adminstration

revolve around his personal interventions; a chief minister centric system would not have delivered the speed and impartiality that a rule-based transparent system does. Moreover, the mandate given to the department is to encourage opening of schools and not to put needless hurdles.

However, there are times when the chief minister's intervention has been necessary. Zafar describes how Modi handles such situations:

> I can give you several examples of how Modi goes out of his way to ease things. For instance, Nutan School run by a Hindu trust was located in Bapu Nagar, which is in the heart of a Muslim area. But, when the number of Muslims increased, they sold it to a Muslim management. It has 1,400 Muslims girls studying in the morning shift, and 1,400 boys in the afternoon shift. One night, suddenly on a Sunday, at 10.30 p.m., I received a phone call from one of the gentlemen who runs the school saying, "Zafar *miyan*, there is a big problem. Our school building is going to be demolished. The police is already here and they plan to demolish it at ten in the morning. No one except Modi can save our school." I replied in jest that there is only Modi for you now, as though Allah *miyan* has vanished. As if Modi is God! It is now 10.30 p.m. How can I call Modi at such a late hour? He insisted that I phone him right then.
>
> This happened in 2007. You won't believe it, at 10.45 in the night, I called Modi at his residence. His secretary told me, "Sahib has gone out." I told him to please get Modi sahib to phone me before seven tomorrow morning. Next morning, at 6:59, Modi called me and said, "How come you wanted to talk to me early morning?" I said, Sir, there is a Muslim school in Bapu Nagar—I don't know whether its building is illegal or legal. All I know is that the municipality is about to demolish it. But you have to save it. He said, "You people put me in a tight spot. It is an illegal structure and there is a High Court order that the Municipal Corporation has to demolish all illegal structures." I said this matter relates to a school, you have to help. Modi responded with a laugh saying, "If the school gets demolished, the *museebat* (headache) of dealing with those 2,800 children will after all also come on my head! So I better do something." Sure enough, Modi stopped demolition that day. Later on, his officers advised us how to get the school legalised.
>
> There is another incident worth recalling. In 2005, three prominent Muslim scholars had been issued warrants in connection with Godhra murders. These warrants had already been pasted on their houses. Those people came to me and said, "Ahmedbhai is a prominent Muslim leader in Delhi; we will phone him for help." I told them, even if you phone him, he is not the one ruling

here. You will ultimately have to talk to Modi to help these scholars.' They said, "No, we will talk to our Ahmedbhai." They called on four different phone numbers but could not get through to him. So they left their phone numbers at his office, saying, "We are sure he will call us back by tonight." The next day they called me and said, "He did not return our call." That is when I offered to call Modi's office.

Per chance, Modi sahib was right there in his office then. He came on the line right away. I told him about the three scholars and said that I could vouch for them as well as I could about my own father. They were highly respected and yet being harassed. Modi said, "Give me their names." It felt like he wrote down the names himself as I gave their details. As this conversation was going on, one of the maulanas passed me a note saying such-and-such maulana's passport had been confiscated. So I told Modi, Sir, there is this passport case also. He said, "Tell this person that when he has to go abroad, it is my assurance that we will give him a passport."

Within eight hours of this phone call, the deputy commissioner went and removed the summons that had been pasted on the houses of the maulanas and officially withdrew the warrants of arrest. But it wasn't just at the *sultani farmaan* of Modi. He got the matter investigated and confirmed their innocence before the collector withdrew the order. Likewise, there were cases of Muslims in jail charged with Section 268. They had not been out for ten years. We went to Modi and he allowed five such boys out on humanitarian grounds but only after proper procedures.

Let me give you another instance of the difference between the functioning of self-styled secular politicians and that of Modi. When Mahesh Bhatt's film *Jism 2* was to be released, it faced trouble in Maharashtra and Gujarat. The party workers of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), an alliance partner of the Congress Party, threatened to attack any theatre that dared release the film. They tore up film posters and defaced the film's publicity hoardings saying they would not allow the screening of such a vulgar film. Even though the National Censor Board had cleared the film, the NCP's moral police was adamant. So Mahesh Bhatt called the senior most leader of NCP, Sharad Pawar, and told him that his party cadres in Gujarat were threatening harm to cinema halls that were to screen the film. I was present when that conversation took place.

Sharad Pawar laughed and said, "Do you want me to seek protection from Narendra Modi even though I am his political adversary? Don't worry. Nothing of the sort will happen." But two days later, I got a call from Mahesh Bhatt saying that threats from the NCP workers had actually increased. I

assured Bhatt sahib that I would talk to Modi on his behalf. Even though Bhatt remained a sworn enemy of Modi, Modi's response was clear and forthright. "No question of the government allowing anyone to create disturbance on this issue. Rule of law will prevail. Since the Censor Board has cleared the film, nobody has the right to obstruct its screening through lawless acts." He told me to communicate to Bhatt sahib to sleep peacefully because the government would not tolerate hoodlum action.

Within minutes of this conversation, Bhatt sahib phoned me and said, "The police commissioner of Baroda, the city in which NCP workers were most aggressive, called to assure me that the government is committed to taking strict action against any disruptive activity. When I told the police commissioner that the theatre owners are petrified and therefore unwilling to screen the film, the police commissioner personally went and met the owners to assure them that they had no cause to worry." And, indeed, the film saw a peaceful release. Bhatt sahib told me, "*Yaar,* I have never seen any other politician or chief minister act with such alacrity and determination anywhere else in India." He openly praised Modi's conduct in the Film Federation meeting saying, "one does not see any other state of India demonstrate such strong commitment to the rule of law."

I did confirm these facts with Mahesh Bhatt. He agreed Modi had ensured peaceful release of *Jism 2*. But he was still angry about *Jism 1* getting into trouble, and his son facing difficulties on account of his supposedly innocent friendship or association with David Coleman Headley, a Pakistani-American from Chicago who conspired with the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* group and Pakistani military officers to launch multiple terror attacks in Mumbai and promote other terrorist activity. I somehow failed to understand what Modi had to do with his son's case since David Headley case is being handled by central agencies.

I asked Zafar, when the VHP types created a similar ruckus against a painting exhibition in Baroda or when the film *Parzania*'s release was stopped, Modi had not behaved with similar determination. So why this change? Zafar replied:

Modi admits that it was a mistake not to let *Fanaa* or *Parzania* run in Gujarat theatres or let hoodlums get away with disrupting the Baroda College of Art exhibition. The VHP, Bajrang Dal etc. had created a lot of trouble for him at that time. So, he had decided that the rule of law would prevail henceforth, no

matter what the political cost. My impression is that those incidents took place when Gujarat was still under the VHP control. The *Parzania* incident happened in 2003 when Modi was not in full control of the state administration. The police force was still under the influence of previous regimes at that time. It took him 2-3 years to put governance on track. Now, Modi has a grip over the administration. Even the police know it is on watch, and Modi will not overlook any laxity or partisan conduct. That is the reason why today the Muslims feel very secure and safe in Gujarat. They know that no injustice will be done to them. Hundreds of Muslim groups have met him on various issues. Each has had a similar experience of being listened to respectfully and having their grievances addressed expeditiously. Modi delivers what he promises.

Since Zafar's account seemed so much at variance with the demonised image of Modi, I double-checked with several persons, including officers who have worked with him. Every single person who had actually taken some genuine issue to Modi had an identical story to tell. A very telling account came from V.V. Augustine from Kerala, who interacted with Modi frequently during his tenure as a member of the National Minorities Commission:

Contrary to the propaganda that Modi ji is supposed to be anti-minority, my experience is that Modi is a very minority friendly person. When I was member of the Minorities Commission, the Christian community of Vapi district in Gujarat brought a serious issue to my notice. They number around 7,000 in that area. There are several churches in Vapi of different Christian denominations that include Catholics, Protestants, Syrian Christians, and several others.

Since the last 40 years, they had been trying, without any success, to get a piece of land for a cemetery for burying their dead. They had even approached the Central government for helping them acquire a piece of land, which they were willing to pay for. But the administration kept dragging the matter for decades. This caused enormous inconvenience because they had to take dead bodies for burial 40 miles from Vapi. In order to lobby collectively, they formed a Vapi Christian Association and approached me for help as a member of the Minorities Commission.

I asked them to write one more fresh application addressed to the collector of the district. I went to meet the collector personally and he told me frankly, "This has to be a government decision because the local people have a problem with having a graveyard in their midst. Please approach the appropriate authority."

I therefore decided to talk straight to Modi ji and explained the matter to him. He listened to me with full attention and said, "Yes, you have a genuine issue. Tell me, have you identified a piece of land you want?" I told him that we have a place but the local people are resisting our acquiring it. Modi said, "That is not your problem; that's mine. Just tell me where you want the land and I will call for a report." Within a matter of hours, he had the full report from the collector, who told him that since that particular piece of land was right in the middle of the town, the local people were resisting having a graveyard there.

Modi then asked the collector to work in coordination with the Vapi Christian Association and identify a suitable piece of land. Within no time, the land was identified on the outskirts of the town and the Christian community was gifted one-and-a-half acres of land by the State government free of charge.

I have interacted with him on numerous issues since then, and have always found him extremely helpful and responsive. For instance, in the Dang tribal areas, there are settlements of neo-Christians. The VHP had become very active in the area resulting in a lot of tension. When they planned to organise a big *Shabari Kumbh Mela* in that area in 2006, the Christians became extremely nervous and feared that they would be attacked during that period. We went to Modi with our apprehensions. Christian organisations demanded a ban on the Shabari Mela. Modi did not ban the mela because that would have given the VHP an excuse to create a ruckus that Hindus were being put down at the behest of Christians leading to more tension. He assured us that nobody would be allowed to indulge in violence or other forms of lawless behavior and issued firm instructions to the police commissioner of the area. Indeed, the mela passed off peacefully, this despite the fact that, during 2002, non-Christian tribals had attacked Christian settlements leading to a great deal of mutual hostility and suspicion. Not surprisingly, most Christians vote for Modi. They have never complained against his regime.

When I met Modi even on small matters, he supported all genuine demands. In another incident, there was a problem with Hindus and Muslims in a small village near Baroda in 2004. He gave me a free hand to act as an intermediary. I called a joint meeting. A Muslim had killed a Hindu over business fallout and Hindus retaliated. They were not even on talking terms. But I brought them together and made them talk to each other while keeping the media out. The collector was also given instructions by Modi ji to extend full cooperation.

We conducted peace meetings to bring in communal harmony. Gujarat newspapers gave prominent coverage to how the 'Augustine Mission' was successful. But the peace mission could not have succeeded if the

administration had not been fully supportive. People who spread the canard that Modi is against minorities are reflecting their own political biases. My experience is entirely different. He listens very carefully and acts very fast in case of genuine problems.

As a member of the Minorities Commission, I dealt with several states. The governments of Odisha and Madhya Pradesh have also been good. But no chief minister is as good, as strong and determined as Modi. Once he takes up an issue, he sees it through to its logical conclusion.

Now, even Muslims realise that Modi is good for them. There are two kinds of Muslims in Gujarat—the rich and the poor. My experience tells me the poor Muslims are solidly with Modi because a riot-free Gujarat and a resurgent economy with new opportunities have benefited these poorer Muslims far more dramatically. It has provided them avenues of upward mobility. I admire Modi and I want him to be the prime minister. I always go by factual accounts. Those who are obsessed with injustice done to minorities should ask ourselves: Who has given the minorities full rights? It is the Hindu majority. Who wrote the Constitution? Mostly Hindus! We must appreciate Hindus for this and give them their due credit.

Some months later, I travelled to Vapi and to the Dang area to confirm Augustine's account with Christian community leaders. They endorsed Augustine's statements as far as the graveyard and other related issues were concerned. However their responses were far more complex than that of Augustine. I will provide a fuller account of that interaction in my next book.

CHAPTER 3

Narendra Modi Airdropped as CM in October 2001

NaMo's First Message to the People of Gujarat

The mantra of my entire work style is 'Our Gujarat'. This sense of 'ourness' means everything to me—'Our Gujarat, Unique Gujarat'. How do we further highlight the diversity of Gujarat, how to make it shine brighter, how do we strengthen the sense of 'Ourness'?

NaMo's first statement after assuming office as CM, October 7, 2001

On October 7, 2001, Narendra Modi who had never even held the office of sarpanch suddenly became the chief minister of a big state undergoing serious crisis on diverse fronts.

He had neither fought any election for himself nor held any position in the government. Even though he had worked as an organisational man in BJP, he had no direct exposure to the ways of the bureaucracy and the system of administration. Modi says, during the regimes of earlier chief ministers of BJP, he had never ever stepped into the CM's chamber despite being the general secretary of the party. During some part of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure as prime minister, Modi was in Delhi as the general secretary of the BJP. He says he saw the prime minister's office only when he was appointed as spokesperson of the Party. At that time he needed to remain in touch with the PMO since he had to brief the media on a daily basis.

Modi's appointment as the chief minister of Gujarat was rather dramatic. After having worked hard to build the party organisation for several years, which helped the BJP come to power, the Gujarat state BJP led by the then state BJP President, Sanjay Joshi and former Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel, banished Modi from Gujarat. For six years, Modi was barred from entering the state, even when he was the national secretary of the BJP. Vijay Rupani, his old colleague from Rajkot, says

that Modi used to joke about it saying, "I am the national secretary of the Party minus Gujarat."

Therefore, his appointment as CM of Gujarat was as much of a shock for Modi as it was for his opponents. He was sent to replace Keshubhai because the Gujarat government was in a total mess. Gujarat Assembly elections were due towards the end of 2002. This had put the central leaders of BJP in panic. Defeat in Gujarat would have meant a terrible setback for the Vajpayee-led NDA government at the Centre. How Narendra Modi got the news that he had been chosen to replace Keshubhai is well described by M.V. Kamath and Kalindi Randeri:

> The field had been left open to his [Modi's] one-time colleagues who were indulging in in-fighting and petty politics… From 1995 to 2001, except during the 1999 elections, Gujarat was out of bounds for Narendra for all purposes, whose work as party general secretary kept him in Delhi…[Modi] spent most of the time travelling across India for organisational work…
>
> Politically, Gujarat was in the doldrums. The BJP government and the Party were acting and working like two exclusive entities—passing the buck to each other when they failed to deliver. The people of Gujarat, who had given the BJP an absolute majority, felt cheated. And while the people felt cheated, the ministers and leaders seemed to continue working for personal stakes. The BJP in Gujarat needed someone to re-inculcate a sense of discipline and unity towards the organisation… Indeed, matters had come to such a pass that in one whole year (2000-01), the party could not win a single by-election in the state. Losing the prestigious Sabarmati assembly seat, Sabarkantha Lok Sabha seat, and all local self-government, taluka, *nagar palika* (municipal corporation) elections to the Congress came as a wake-up call for the BJP. It decided to act. And the only man, according to the senior party leaders, who could set matters right was Narendra. He was peremptorily told to proceed to Ahmedabad to take over the reins of power as chief minister from Keshubhai Patel.[1]

It happened in a somewhat unexpected manner. Madhavrao Scindia had died in a plane crash on September 30, 2001. Four journalists travelling with him also perished in that crash. Among them was a cameraman

1 M.V. Kamath and Kalindi Randeri, *Narendra Modi: The Architect of Modern State*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2009, pp. 80-1.

of Aaj Tak, Gopal, whom Modi knew well. So on October 1, 2001 Modi had gone for Gopal's cremation in Delhi when he received a call from the prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who asked Modi to see him later in the evening.

When Vajpayee told Modi to leave for Gujarat, and work there, Modi thought he is being sent for organisational work. So he asked whether he would be in charge only of Gujarat or of some other state as well? But Atalji said, "No, no, you will have to contest elections. You have so far helped others fight. Now you will have to fight one for yourself." As he came to know that he was being marked out for chief ministership, he told Atalji, "That is not my work. I have been away from Gujarat for six long years. I am not familiar with the issues. What will I do there? It is not a field of my liking…"[2]

But both Advani and Vajpayee prevailed upon Modi to accept the responsibility. The choice had fallen on Modi because he was the one who had built the party organisation from the bottom-up and led it to many electoral victories. Given the circumstances under which Keshubhai and Sanjay Joshi had banished him out of Gujarat and the state of affairs in the Party, NaMo knew he was not going to have an easy time in Gujarat. This is how he described in an interview with me his first moves as he left for Gujarat:

> Since I didn't have any place to stay in Gandhinagar, I called the party office and asked them to book a room for me in the Circuit House. I did not want to stay in anyone's house as I used to earlier. Staying in the Circuit House also meant that people would be able to meet me freely. But I told my party colleagues not to book the room in the name of any MLA because that comes at a concessional rate. I asked them to book it in my name as a citizen so that I make full payment. At that time I had no idea how many days I would have to stay in the Circuit House and what all I would have to do since I didn't know the nitty-gritty of processes involved in government functioning. I had returned to Gujarat after six years. Since the media is hyperactive on these issues, the news spread fast. My plan was to go and meet my mother straight after landing in Ahmedabad. That is exactly what I did.
>
> From the very first day, the people who came to meet me at the Circuit House

2 Ibid., pp. 81-2.

had one common refrain: "Modi ji why are you accepting this post? The party is sinking in Gujarat and has lost its *pratistha* (respect)." The second message people gave me was: "Whether you manage to do any other worthwhile thing or not, just ensure that we get electricity at the time of our evening meal. There is so much distress in villages because of lack of electricity."

The third refrain was: "Well it's good that the party decided to bring about a change. You have very little time and, therefore, it is difficult to say whether you will be able to change much. But at least you will try."

On October 4, 2001, NaMo was elected leader of the BJP legislative party. Even though the outgoing Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel proposed NaMo's name for the post, he never really made peace with Modi and worked steadfastly to damage his successor. However, there was widespread jubilation among the party workers. On October 5, 2001, *Express News Service* carried the following report: "National BJP General Secretary and RSS strongman Narendra Modi, who is scheduled to be sworn in as chief minister on Sunday, appears all set to make sweeping changes in the ministry to resurrect the Party's image in Gujarat."

However, Modi did not make any sweeping changes in his cabinet. To quote his party colleague, Vijaybhai Rupani:

When he first came to Gujarat as CM, I was in the BJP core group of Gujarat state. Sanjay Joshi was our president. Even at that time, Narendrabhai sat with party colleagues and said, "We have to jointly decide on the ministry. The core group of the party should hold a meeting and prepare a list of names for the Cabinet." And he announced exactly the same list of names that the party had collectively decided on despite the fact that he had doubts about the integrity and performance capacity of 3-4 people. For example, Narendrabhai had serious misgivings about Gordhan Zadaphia and he told us to rethink on his name, saying he is likely to create mischief. But all of us insisted that he include Zadaphia in the Cabinet in order to avoid inner party conflicts. It was Sanjay Joshi as our state party president who pushed for Zadaphia's name as the home minister. Narendra bhai accepted without fuss whatever names the party gave for inclusion in his cabinet and said, "*Chalo yehi hai agar panchon ki rai, to theek hai aage badho*" (Fine, if this is the opinion of the *panchas,* so be it). He is quintessentially a team player. Those who speak against him saying

> he is authoritarian are telling lies. I have known him for long and know that he is far from being dictatorial.
>
> Though Modi ji accepted the Party's advice and included Zadaphia in the Cabinet, but when the Governor announced his name, Zadaphia refused to come on the stage to take oath, saying, "I will not work with Narendra Modi." He created a big ruckus even after accepting a ministry – just because he wanted to defame Narendrabhai. In the very first TV interview he gave after the oath taking ceremony, he was asked why you didn't go for oath taking. His response was to level all kinds of false charges against Narendrabhai and say, "I will never work with him." He was out to harm Narendrabhai from day one.

And sure enough Zadaphia proved Modi's reservations were well founded because during the 2002 riots, he is alleged to have played a very sinister role in fomenting violence. Within no time he left the BJP and joined Keshubhai's breakaway party which has been working closely with the Congress Party to defeat Modi in election after election.

As the account in the later part of the chapter shows, Modi neither shook up the bureaucracy nor handpicked his ministers. But since the mandate given by the party high command to NaMo was to pull Gujarat BJP out of the deep morass and redeem the prestige of its government, NaMo made his priorities clear soon after he arrived from Delhi by announcing: "I have come here to play a one-day match. I need fast and performing batsmen to score runs in the limited-overs game."[3]

On His Way to the Swearing-in Ceremony

On October 7, 2001: When Modi had to go to Raj Bhawan for the swearing-in ceremony, he did not use a brand new snazzy car as chief ministers are prone to do. He went in an ordinary fairly old navy blue Maruti 800, which was even in those days considered one of the cheapest models of cars.

On his way to the oath taking ceremony, Modi stopped to seek the blessings of 5 leading figures of the freedom movement. He began with a silent prayer at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, followed by a similar floral tribute and prayer at the statues of Sardar Patel and Babasaheb Amebedkar.[4] All these three figures have left a deep imprint on Modi and

3 Kamath & Randeri, Narendra Modi: *The Architect of Modern State*, p. 83.

4 To watch Narendra Modi's first oath taking ceremony on October 7, 2001, see the link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jd0Ndc3mQ4Q.

played an important role in shaping his vision and agenda. Thereafter, he went to seek blessings at the statues of Ravi Shankar Vyas and Vithalbhai Jhaverbhai Patel. The first three names are well known. Here is a brief description of the other two Gujarati stalwarts.

Ravi Shankar Vyas (1884–1984), also known as "Borinvala Maharaj" and "Muksevak"—or "silent worker", was one of the earliest and closest associates of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. In the 1920's and 1930's, he was one of the key organisers of the freedom movement and revolts against the British rule in Gujarat. His political stature is evident from the fact that he was the one chosen to inaugurate the formation of Gujarat as a separate state in 1960.

Vithalbhai Jhaverbhai Patel was the elder brother of Sardar Patel. Vithalbhai also joined the Congress Party but left it to form the Swaraj Party with Chittranjan Das and Motilal Nehru.

Both these stalwarts have been universally revered among Gujaratis of all hues, cutting across party lines. I asked NaMo, how come he was travelling in a small Maruti car the day he went to take oath as CM in 2001 given that the government doesn't have small Maruti car in its fleet of official vehicles. This is how he explained the choice of his vehicle:

> When Chimanbhai Patel became CM and Keshubhai was No. 2 in his cabinet, during the oath taking ceremony I remembered having seen a photograph of a fleet of new cars for the ministers published in all Gujarati newspapers. I was disturbed by the spectacle and felt it gave a wrong message. Even though such things are routine in government but I felt such images annoy people.
>
> So I told my officials, I don't want all that *taam-jham* around my swearing-in. When I returned to Gandhinagar after six years, I didn't have a vehicle of my own. Therefore, I asked the party to send me a party worker's car along with a driver so that I could move around freely. That is the car that took me for the oath taking ceremony.

First Press Interaction on Becoming CM

It is customary for new chief ministers to hold a press conference soon after the oath-taking ceremony. But Modi avoided doing that. Instead, he made a short statement to the press almost in bullet form followed by very few questions which he answered equally tersely. However, even in this brief interaction, he clearly sets out his government's priorities. They

are further elaborated in a "Message" he delivered to fellow Gujaratis through TV on October 10, 2001.

> I am meeting you after many years and that too in a new role… This year we got enough rain for the needs of agriculture but the drinking water crisis continues to stare at us. Due to the natural calamity we faced in the form of an earthquake, the Gujarat government faces the mammoth task of rehabilitation of earthquake victims.
>
> My message to my farmer brothers in Gujarat villages is, I am well aware of the problems you face on account of power shortage. I will soon come up with a concrete plan and take steps in the direction of resolving this problem.
>
> The new government wants to make the service delivery system more impactful to make governance effective. I also have a vision for creating a mechanism for resolving centre state conflicts. It will be our endeavour to see that Gujarat gets maximum possible cooperation from the Centre.
>
> I have given a notification today that panchayat elections be organised at the earliest. We have also decided that all those villages that elect their panchayats through total consensus will get the status of *Samras*[5] *Grams* (mutual harmony villages) and given special incentives for development. The government will make all possible efforts to help create conducive environment for samras villages. This will enable villages to rise above divisive political machinations and create a conducive environment for development.
>
> After September 11, 2001, the war against terrorism needs to be speeded up. Therefore, starting yesterday, the [Gujarat Government] has started taking some concrete steps. A border state like Gujarat needs to be alert and make advance preparations to preempt any further attacks. Today, I spent the entire day discussing these issues. I met the officials of the army, the Border Security Force, as well as of the Air Force. I also sat with a high powered committee looking into the internal security of Gujarat to discuss what we need to do in case of any *sankat* (crisis) in the border areas of Gujarat and to discuss what kind of coordination there needs to be between defense and civil authorities in the state so that we have a vigilant and proactive institutional mechanism for intelligence exchange. We have discussed how all departments of Gujarat government that deal with security related issues should remain alert….

5 '*Sam*' means equal or togetherness and '*rasa*' refers to nectar. The two words, with roots in Sanskrit, when joined, mean spirit of consensus based on shared feelings, values, and goals.

> Narmada is the prime agenda for the 36 lakh hectares of parched earth of Gujarat. Narmada is the prime agenda of crores of speechless, thirsty animals. Narmada is the prime agenda of 5 crore thirsty Gujaratis.

He went on to inform the press that the very next day he has fixed a long meeting with departments concerned with earthquake rehabilitation. After this first briefing, he will himself go to Kutch. "After understanding the current status, direction, and speed of rehabilitation work, I will come back to the media only if I have something worthwhile to communicate and I have something concrete on the agenda. It must demonstrate courage, forbearance, goodness of heart, *saujanyata* (capability), the power of 'Ourness'—these things will be decisive in creating the Gujarat of tomorrow…"

When one of the reporters asked Modi what kind of changes he would like to bring about in the state administration in order to achieve his targets, Modi's response was very telling:

> I don't believe everything in the administration requires to be changed. It is all a matter of changing priorities. The foremost need of Gujarat is speedy delivery of services and I have faith that all the officials and employees of Gujarat government will cooperate with me in increasing the speed of serving Gujarat.

And this is exactly what Modi set out to do: no suspensions, no wholesale transfers, no big shake ups nor too many new laws. As we will see in later chapters, Modi went about changing the face of governance using the same personnel, same government rules, even though he changed many archaic regulations along the way. But for specific projects, he also inducted a good amount of professional talent from outside the government system in order to bring in fresh ideas and energy.

The video footage of that occasion shows a very guarded and visibly tense Modi rattling off what he had to convey in a monotone. When I asked him the reason for this he explained it as follows:

> When earlier chief ministers took oath, on that very evening they would have special meetings with media persons—some even visited the chambers of newspaper editors. I did not even hold a press conference, the reason being that I had returned to Gujarat after six years. I had no clue about this creature called 'the government.' Moreover, I was already aware of the hostile environment

against me. I was apprehensive and worried that if I address a press conference, I may get trapped in a web of words.

I was not comfortable addressing the media because they had maligned me without any cause. In any case, in that press conference, I could not have made big statements because the performance graph of my party was very low. Moreover, I had been given that post after removing someone else. One loose word from me and it would have created a ruckus. That would have further harmed my party. All these anxieties loomed large over my mind.

Modi's first Message as CM to Gujaratis

Instead of a press conference, on October 10, 2001 Modi conveyed the following message to the people of Gujarat listing his government's priorities. It has no bluster, no divisive rhetoric, no communal appeal:

I don't know what the people expect from me. All I can say is that I am passionate about serving the people of Gujarat with sincerity. I have been given this opportunity to come amidst you in a completely new role. Even now these two words—"Narendra Modi' and "chief minister"—don't sit well together. Respecting the sentiments of numerous friends who want me to assume the charge of governance, I have taken on this job because it has given me once again the opportunity to serve my *janmabhoomi* (land of birth), *karmabhoomi* (land of karma), and the people of Gujarat in a new role.

However, I have a big challenge to meet. I have come to you with full *shraddha* (faith) that with your love I will be successful in earning a good name by fulfilling this duty. This is an altogether new job in my political life…

I will never forget this *utkantha* (eagerness), *utsah* (enthusiasm), and *prem* (love) I have received from the people of Gujarat. Your love will always remain a source of inspiration for me. Your continued cooperation will enable me to tread the path of progress…

Be it a function to honour me or the oath-taking ceremony last week, wherever I went I felt that the love that is being expressed for me is combined with an expectation… I am firmly determined to make the people of Gujarat as well as those of you who have settled outside the state as partners in the new responsibility I have undertaken.

Sense of "Ourness" for "Unique Gujarat:" For the last six years, I have stayed away from Gujarat but I have kept a close watch on the sunshine and shadows of developments in the state as well as the aspirations of its people. Gujarat has incredible potential for development and the people of Gujarat have *anant karyashakti* (endless work potential). This is the uniqueness of

Gujarat. I strongly believe that Gujarat's potential lies in the 'power of oneness' (*apnepan ki shakti*).

Hence, I am presenting the mantra of *purushartha* (initiative and the capacity to work hard) before you. The mantra of my entire work style is 'Our Gujarat'. This sense of 'ourness' means everything to me—'Our Gujarat, Unique Gujarat'. How do we further highlight the diversity of Gujarat, how to make it shine brighter, how do we strengthen the sense of 'ourness'?

'Our Gujarat, Unique Gujarat' is not a political agenda or slogan of a chief minister. It is an inner call of *purusharth* to every Gujarati to feel a sense of pride in our *watan* (homeland), and our society. I have full faith that all of you will share this sentiment.

It has endless potential for enterprise; it has *utkantha* (eagerness) and wisdom, *sanskars* of compassion, limitless strength that comes from mutual cooperation, desire for dialogue, capacity to maintain peace and safety, and an irrepressible desire for prosperity and development. Our Gujarat is a creative mix of all these social values…

'Unique Gujarat' means that each of us internalise all these *sanskars*. We do not need to follow anyone; nor are we competing with others. Our Gujarat wants to show a path which others would want to follow and adopt. That is the kind of Gujarat we are going to create. I am fully aware of the problems and challenges confronting my administration. But it is in my temperament to face problems head on; it is my nature to challenge the challenges. I know the climb is steep but my political will and the support of Gujarat's people will ensure that my aims and targets remain high. Normally, in a democracy, a party gets a ruling tenure of five years. Out of those, three-and-a-half years have already passed and we are left with only one-and-a-half years. I am counting it in hours—less than 12,000 hours are available to me. My desire and my aim is to serve the people of Gujarat to my utmost capacity.

I've analysed the current sentiments of people and what corrective measures are needed. The government has to answer numerous questions all of which require immediate solutions. I am aware of the expectations people have of the administration and from the government.

Towards Pro People Governance: The devastating earthquake, the continuous drought of the last two years, and the international downturn have created severe problems in people's lives. Our economy has also been adversely affected. Only if the process of reconstruction process demonstrates speed and *purusharth* to alleviate the pain inflicted on Gujarat by natural and manmade tragedies, will the faith of the people of Gujarat in their government be restored.

It is my foremost priority to restore the faith of diverse people in the administration at all levels. I want to assure you that the administration will work towards creating a clean image. The government machinery must own full responsibility if its image is sullied in the public mind. As the head of the administration, I will not accept even the smallest blot in the areas under my charge. From the very first day of my taking charge, I've started taking decisive steps in this direction. I will always remain committed to ensuring that the entire administration has a clean image; and to take effective measures to make its functioning transparent and efficient. I am and will always remain committed to salutary disciplinary action against those who are responsible for tardiness in administration.

The primary duty of a government official is to serve people. It is my constitutional responsibility to motivate and inspire them to work efficiently and demonstrate decisiveness and enthusiasm in their work in order to earn people's confidence…I will keep the administrative machinery constantly alert and ensure that the decisions taken by the government are sincerely implemented by removing the tardiness in administration and by breathing new life into the government machinery.

It is unacceptable to me that anyone among my Cabinet colleagues displays a "take for granted" attitude towards their job. I want to sensitise the government machinery at every level to respond to people's problems with sincerity. I don't want officials to fail at any stage of decision making.

On Combating Corruption: Corruption pollutes the atmosphere and damages the image of administration, the blame for which falls squarely on the government. It is not my nature to protect anyone when made aware of the slightest hint of corruption. I am giving decisive signals to the administration. It is my aspiration to provide an all round, effective and *gatisheel* (progressive) administration.

There are numerous public issues that my government faces, and these issues require immediate attention. Keeping the gravity of these issues in mind, my first priority will be to make the administrative machinery worthy of the tasks at hand.

Earthquake Rehabilitation First Priority: To alleviate the havoc in people's lives due to the unprecedented devastation caused by the recent earthquake, I have made a firm resolve to create mechanisms for speedy and decisive rehabilitation, to create a sense of confidence in the measures being taken [by the government] and to ensure that all of it is implemented through a *samanvay* (bringing together) of the administration and people's initiative (*purusharth*).

Our main concern is to bring about effective and quality rehabilitation of the victims of the recent earthquake. The problems created by natural disasters also act as a litmus test for any society. The recent early rains brought water but the drinking water crisis remains unchanged. We are giving highest priority to long term measures that will permanently remove water scarcity.

Farmers' Concerns, High on Agenda: The second big problem for the farmers here in Gujarat is that of power deficit. I understand the anguish and pain of our farmers whose crops are wilting despite all their hard labour because we don't have enough power to pump out water for irrigation. My government is not going to rest until we become partners in the anxieties and concerns of our farmers. We will spare no efforts in ensuring that the maximum possible share of limited power that is currently available goes to agriculture. We will make result-oriented arrangements for this within a set time-frame.

I consider the Narmada Project a turning point in Gujarat's development. The Sardar Sarovar Project is not just my priority but it is foremost on the agenda of five crore people, of crores of animals, birds and lakhs of hectares of parched earth of Gujarat. It is our collective resolve to deploy our full strength and *purusharth* to complete the Narmada Scheme within a set time-frame.

Ensuring Border Security: I would also like to bring to your notice that as a border state, Gujarat is shouldering a sensitive responsibility. America has declared a war against terrorism in Afghanistan. No one can possibly escape the consequences of this war. As citizens of India, we are all imbued with a sense of patriotism. Our brave soldiers and officers of the armed forces are taking care of Gujarat's international border. But the domain of internal security is no less important. If the nation and society are powerful and fully alert against anti-national activities, then no one dare violate the line of internal security. Even if we don't face the direct consequences of war, we still need to be vigilant about the internal aspects of security. Citizen's vigilance is the need of the hour. People should not be fearful or panicky but I appeal to you to display vigilance in every respect. Be vigilant and ask others to be alert. Our mantra should be: 'Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.'

Culture of Lok Seva: I am the kind of person who lives among ordinary people. I've experienced the limitless potential of citizen's power. Gujarat has established high traditions of service to humanity. Voluntary organisations and social service institutions have shown the path of *lok seva* (service to the people). It is my aspiration to make the government a vehicle of channeling the innate initiative of people into playing a decisive role in the development

process. Gujarat's potential will fly high only when each of us, be it farmers or employees, traders or industrialists, labourers or social workers, are inspired to do our duty. This government will not rest until people get the feeling that this is their government. If I succeed in making it 'our government,' if it becomes the government of five crore Gujaratis, only then can we consider it successful.

On Unemployment & Poverty: I've started studying in depth the main issues confronting Gujarat—problems like unemployment and poverty can destroy any society and create an environment of total nihilism... I am focusing my attention on the programs that can resolve these issues. In this context, I am aware of the mindset of dependence on central government assistance in this regard. It is my resolve to do away with the present atmosphere of demoralisation by creating concrete institutional arrangements that will inspire confidence in government.

It will be my constant endeavour to deploy science and technology for the long-term development of Gujarat, to put to optimum use the natural resources available to us and ensure their benefits reach people who are today at the farthest margins of society.

Mobilising Gram Shakti: Right now I am guiding the administration to speed up the delivery of existing development-oriented programs for the benefit of people. However, I will come again before you to present a long-term vision and direction.

I am aware that due to prevailing disturbed conditions, the Gram Panchayat elections have been stalled. It will be my endeavour to complete this democratic exercise at the earliest. In addition, I will endeavour to instil new strength to *gram shakti* (village power) to combat the culture of political conspiracies, enmities, and mutual jealousies in village politics. That is why I am presenting before you the proposal for samras panchayats.

Any village which elects its representatives through general consensus will be given the status of a samras village and to encourage this process, I am announcing special incentives for samras villages to bring about speedy development of such villages. It is my aspiration that these samras villages emerge as symbols of social unity and move from *Gram Raj* to *Ram Raj* and explore new horizons of development.

Reins of Power in the Hands of 5 Crore Gujaratis: After assuming power, I've set this as the foremost agenda of the administrative machinery. But, the government intervention will be limited to playing a motivational role. I want the force of citizen's initiatives to become more widespread. We want to build

> a Gujarat in which the citizen is fearless but is not indifferent towards social good; the youth is filled with enthusiasm and not depressed by unemployment; where women acquire their rightful position in society and will not remain uneducated; where administration is transparent and energetic; where citizens do not feel helpless about their rights. The administration will be sensitive and people-centric; every Gujarati will be dedicated to the nation with his head held high. We will never let you feel helpless. The *baagdor* (reins) of the movement for development will be in the hands of five crore Gujaratis. This Gujarat of ours will be a unique Gujarat. I invite you all to become partners in this. *Jai Jai Garvi Gujarat, Vande Matram, Jai Hind!*

Modi's Uniflying Agenda Petrifies Congress

I have translated from Gujarati the first statement of Modi on October 8, 2001 and the first public "Message" he issued on Doordarshan to the people of Gujarat on October 10, 2001 almost in full to give the readers first hand idea of the vision and agenda that Modi set from day one of assuming office as Gujarat's chief minister. I challenge people to point out even one line to support the devilish stereotype manufactured by the Congress Party and its allies who project Modi as a divisive polarising politician who turned Gujarat into a laboratory of Hindutva—Hindutva defined by the Congress and its Left secular allies as being quintessentially Hitlerian and fascist in orientation.

On the contrary, far from unleashing divisive forces, from the very first day of taking charge, NaMo addressed the five crore people of Gujarat, which obviously includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians as well as all classes and castes. There is not a hint of chauvinist sentiments against any caste, class or religious community. His vision is development centric with a focus on making the government machinery an honest and able instrument for serving people rather than lording over them.

He wants to make Gujarat a world leader and therefore, doesn't operate with third world standards. This aspiration rests on the foundation of a clean, efficient, and people-oriented administration whose litmus test is winning the respect and confidence of people.

The following chapters will show how he began to deliver on each of his promises. These included:

- High quality and speedy rehabilitation of earthquake-affected people was taken up on a mission mode along with devising enduring mechanisms to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters in future.

- He transformed every development program into a mass movement in order to involve the creative energy of people and make them partners in government endeavours for the development of the state.
- One of the first steps towards putting reins of administration in the hands of the people was the process of empowering and rejuvenating Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas. In the coming months and years, he worked hard to promote samras panchayats urging villages to rise above partisan politics in order to make panchayats an instrument for all round inclusive development.

And since NaMo took his promises very seriously, he expectedly made enemies of all those within his party and in the opposition camp whose idea of holding office of power is loot and plunder. They are the ones who found him authoritarian and dictatorial.

Modis's troubles arose not because he came with divisive agendas, but because he put an end to the politics of divide and rule and plugged the loopholes that facilitate coruption. He made enemies both within BJP and outside because he set about making administration answerable to people, instead of being hostage to politicians and their partisan agendas.

The following chapters describe how his opponents have made endless attempts to derail him from his agenda and present him as a divisive, polarising figure while he remained steadfast in his vision and commitment despite the politically engineered Godhra carnage and the riots that followed.

The demonisation of Modi did not start with the 2002 riots. "Smear Modi Campaign"started from day one and was carried out in the same do-or-die spirit that one witnesses today when Congress Party wants to eliminate him from the prime ministerial race. This will be demonstrated clearly in the chapter on Modi's first election from Rajkot in February 2002. [6]

6 See chapter 9, "Of Muck Throwing and Lotus Blooming".

CHAPTER 4

Learning the Ropes of Governance

Novice NaMo's First Interactions with Bureaucrats

When I became CM, I felt that one of the basic problems with the government is the habit of compartmental thinking and absence of coordination. Convergence is the need of the hour... When I first joined the government, officials were so secretive that they would not share with anyone the policy-making files under the assumption that they were meant to guard them from getting "leaked". I asked them to explain why should policy-making not become public knowledge? I put an end to the culture of secrecy by insisting that each policy draft be put online to make it available in the public domain. My idea was that it will give us good feedback at the formative stage itself... Openness automatically brings in transparency. It is a step ahead of what the Right to Information Act promises.

Narendra Modi in personal interview, 2013

I heard many interesting stories from Narendra Modi's officers about his first interactions with bureaucrats. But I decided to also get NaMo's own version of his first few days as CM. The first officer who went to meet him was one Mr. Ashok Bhatia, the then secretary of GAD (General Administration Department). To quote NaMo's account of that meeting:

> While I was in the Circuit House, a party worker announced that CS of GAD has come to see me. I heard it as GOD and assumed it was some holy man or some saint has come to meet me. So I stood up to receive him but was surprised to find that the man who entered the door was wearing a pant and coat and introduced himself as Mr. Bhatia. [Ashok Bhatia was the additional chief secretary of GAD at the time]
>
> I invited him to sit down but he would not sit till I sat down because bureaucrats go by a certain discipline. I didn't know any of this. He told me, "Sir it is my job to look at GAD requirements. Please let me know if you want

any changes in the chief minister's chamber." I told him, I have never seen the CM's chamber. How can I order any changes in it?

As long as I lived in Delhi, I only had one *khatiya* (cot) and a copper vessel for storing water. This remained my lifestyle even when I was the general secretary of the then ruling party. So when Mr. Bhatia asked me what kind of changes he wanted in the CM's chamber, I said, I have heard that Keshubhai used to sit on a very royal, maharaja type of chair. See if you can change that. But there is no need to buy a new chair, just bring any simple chair that may be lying spare in the Secretariat.

Apparently, it did not take even one hour for this story to spread in the Secretariat. Everyone was surprised that the new CM says don't undertake any extra expenditure for him—this when he was a first time CM. This was in a way the first message Modi conveyed to the administration: No wasteful expenditure. To this day it has stayed this way. His officers say his, personal life style is extremely spartan; a trustee of public money and guards against its misuse vigilantly.

The first conversation between Modi and the then Chief Secretary, Subba Rao has become part of Modi lore. Here is Modi's own version, which I also cross checked with Subba Rao:

When the Chief Secretary Subba Rao came to meet me, his first question was, which officers I wanted posted as part of the chief minister's staff. I was genuinely puzzled and asked him: Don't you already have some officers in the CM's office? Rao explained that each chief minister has the power to handpick a certain number of officers of his choice.

I told him: Look I don't know any of the government officers. You decide and post the officers you consider suitable. But I want you to keep in mind the following criteria:

- Officers you pick should be persons of unquestioned integrity.
- They should have the stamina to put in long hours because I'm a workaholic.
- They should be techno-savvy because I intend to use a great deal of technology to streamline governance.
- They should be capable of teamwork.

My entire life as an RSS worker had been devoted to human resource management. Even when I came to the BJP, I used to put emphasis on these aspects- how to prepare *karyakartas,* create teams and put them to work, give each worker tasks that match his own qualities. My basic training has been to

> assess people, understand their difficulties, and assign jobs to them according to their capabilities. Since I'm basically nurtured by the RSS where teamwork is the foundational principle of the entire organisational structure, it has a central place in my scheme of things.

The fact that Modi neither handpicked officers to work in the CM's office nor transferred out any officer who was close to Keshubhai or other chief ministers, gave a very positive message. However, several senior officials told me that when Narendra Modi's name was announced, there was a great deal of anxiety within the bureaucracy about his total lack of experience in governance. But the first thing that struck his officers was his courtesy to one and all. I was told that he addressed officers older than him in age as "Sir". They also noticed that he did not try to cover up for his lack of information or knowledge about the working of the government machinery. He let his officers guide and train him through the maze of administration. But he learnt fast and soon acquired such a grasp that many of his officers found it hard to keep pace with him. Another quality that put his officers at ease was his habit of listening calmly and carefully to whoever he engaged with. Without a single exception, each officer I talked to said, that NaMo never loses his temper. He never scolded or humiliated anyone and gave even the junior-most officer a quiet patient hearing. They were used to chief ministers who threw tantrums at the slightest pretext. But, though NaMo faced a very tough and turbulent situation when he became CM, by all accounts he always remained calm and focused.

Subba Rao says, "When he became CM, I was very anxious because of his RSS background. So when I met him in the Circuit House I told him, 'Sir, please don't say anything against the law or the Constitution.' But I soon realised that he is very careful and never exceeds his limits or his brief. He is not given to demagoguery or irresponsible and thoughtless statements."

Among the three officers assigned to Modi was P.K.Mishra- a diminutive and unassuming looking man who was appointed principal secretary to the CM. who is reputed to have the knack of getting things done with ease and quiet. This upright officer taught Modi the nitty gritty of administration, how to examine files, where to sign, and even little details like what colour ink to use for his signatures. Modi says Mishra trained him in official procedures like you teach a kid. When I asked

Modi whether the officers assigned to him by Subba Rao turned out to be the right choice, his answer was revealing:

> I've never bothered to analyse that. I'm of the view that what I get out of my officers depends on me. I've never changed my peon or driver or any other functionary. My job is to get work done by whoever is assigned to me by the government. No questions of saying- give me such and such officer.

He did not even change the chief secretary, or the director general of police and worked with same officers, same staff and same driver and telephone operator that were serving Keshubhai. This became the signature tune of Modi's administration- he doesn't cultivate any coterie, none who can claim to be such favourites, claim to be so close to Modi that they can get what they like done through him. The moment any officer tries to do so, he will find himself distanced.

Synergising the Bureaucracy

Getting the bureaucracy to deliver on his ambitious schemes required creating a new work culture. As luck would have it, the Annual Conference of Collectors and District Development Officers (DDOs) was scheduled to meet within the first 3-4 weeks of Modi's coming to power. When the Chief Secretary Subba Rao, came to inform him that he is expected to inaugurate that conference, Modi asked him, "Sahib, what am I expected to do in that function?" Subba Rao told him, "Sir, you come and light the inaugural lamp and address the officers to give any suggestions you may have for them. After that you may leave and we will conduct the rest of the conference."

When Modi asked him what actually happens in the conference, Rao said, "We review the functioning of each department under the collectors and DDOs." Modi agreed to come and told his office to keep that entire day free from all other engagements.

After the ceremonial lightling of the lamp and welcome, it was announced that the CM would address the gathering and do *margdarshan* (offer guidance). Modi surprised them by saying; "I am new to the job and need to learn from you. How can I do your *margdarshan*? You carry on with your meeting. I want to sit and listen for a while."

The earlier practice was that the annual review of collectors and DDOs would start at around 10:30 am and be over by 1 pm. All those officers

who came from various districts after travelling hundreds of miles would return to their respective districts after lunch. The secretary of each department –be it education, agriculture, transport, sanitation--would walk in when it was time for district officials to report on the work of that particular department. He would hear them, ask a few questions, pull them up for this or that and leave. That day Modi had no idea of how these meetings are conducted nor did he know that they were meant to be mere ritualistic exercises that went on year after year.

But since he sat through the meeting, none of the secretaries could leave. Every senior officer had to sit as long as Modi sat. As each collector and DDO made his or her presentation, Modi listened intently and took notes to get an idea of what was going on in each district. Thus, he turned this one meeting into a crash course in getting to know all his officers and assessing the direction of their work. When lunchtime came, he told them, "We are going to continue after lunch." All day he did not speak a word and the meeting continued till 11pm. They hadn't even made prior arrangements for dinner and had to rustle up something impromptu.

At 11 pm, he apologised for making the meeting go on for so long and told them, "I am sorry; I've upset your schedules but it has been a very good day for me because I learnt a lot. Please accept my appreciation for all the work you do and handle with such minute care. We can now wind up." But the officers insisted that he address them. When I asked Modi about this meeting and what he told the officers, he said:

> I told them that thus far I had known government functioning only as an outsider. For the first time I was getting minute details about the inner functioning of the government. When you are learning something new, it is always an enjoyable experience.
>
> I knew that these are the very people through whom I've to get work done. The *sanskar* (philosophy) of human resource management says that I must give them encouragement- whether they are good or bad, whether they've managed to convince me or not. My job was to encourage them by appreciating their work. I told them, I am a workaholic and going to tour a lot. Take it that I'm likely to visit each district twice in a month. But I've a simple request to make- when I come visiting, please do not collect entire caravan of officials of your district. Secondly, don't waste your time and energy into fixing the Circuit House, in bringing new curtains or new bathroom fittings, repainting the room or renovate this or that for me.

> I said all this because in the first fifteen days I had seen how my officials had brought in a lot of new things for me- new taps, new buckets, and so on. So I told them, I'm an ordinary person and can make do with existing arrangements. Please don't spend extra money on me. All I want is cleanliness in the place I stay. Thirdly, I'm not going to attend lavish lunches. I will carry my own lunch box. Lastly, don't bother about getting special vehicles for me- I don't want you to send special convoys from Gandhinagar for taking me around. Whatever vehicle you have available in your department will do. Your routine arrangements are good enough for me. Next, I asked them to make sure that they should slot some time for me to meet the local MLAs and other elected officials. I believe it is my job to give time to people's representatives.

Such unusual instructions in the very first meeting warned the officers that they were dealing with a man who doesn't traverse the beaten track. Every single officer of Gujarat government– senior or junior – that I've met during the last year testified that quiet listening was not confined to that first meeting. This is his routine trademark style. He listens intently to his officers, political colleagues, and whoever else comes to him with suggestions. Only after hearing all sides does he arrives at a decision.

Breaking Silos for Better Coordination

This was followed by another unusual step. He began the practice of all senior secretaries sitting together to listen to each other's plan of action to break down silos and promote convergence. This is how Modi explained the purpose behind this move:

> When I became CM, I felt that one of the basic problems with the government is the habit of compartmental thinking and absence of coordination. Convergence is the need of the hour. I believe that 30 per cent of our country's problems can be solved by simply bringing about convergence.
>
> Making officers of different departments sit and participate in planning processes together, also combats the culture of secrecy which is deeply entrenched in governments. When I first joined the government, officials were so secretive that they would not share with anyone the policy-making files on the assumption that they were meant to guard them from getting "leaked". I asked them to explain why should policy-making not become public knowledge? I put an end to the culture of secrecy by insisting that each policy

> draft be put online to make it available in the public domain. My idea was that it will give us good feedback at the formative stage itself.
>
> To begin with, everyone was startled. But they realised soon how it opened the doors for fresh thinking and helped us overcome limitations that are inherent in the thinking process of government. Another beneficial effect of this openness was that it curbed the power of vested interests in manpulating government policies in their favour. Once in the public domain, not just business rivals, but even ordinary citizens could expose undesirable influences on specific policies. This way we built corrective mechanisms to remedy the flaws and limitation of every policy in its formative stage itself. This has paid us rich dividends in the long run. Since we began taking public suggestions and criticism on board while formulating our plans of action, by and large there is very little opposition and controversy with regard to government policies in Gujarat. I don't claim all our policies are perfect but since they are made in an open and transparent manner, they don't become contentious.
>
> For instance, normally, Development Plans (DPs) or Town Planning Schemes (TPS) provide money making opportunities for politicians and bureaucrats. I made DPs and TPS open in the public domain. Earlier whenever DPs and TP schemes came into the market, there would be thousands of complaints against them. But we get no more than 300 to 400 complaints and those are genuine ones – not from vested interests. Openness automatically brings in transparency. It is a step ahead of what the Right to Information Act promises.

P.K. Mishra who worked closely with Modi during that period, says,

> He set a system whereby twice or thrice a week at six in the evening, the heads and secretaries of all the departments, along with ministers would meet with him. And every day one department had to give a presentation about the activities and plan of action for the next six months or one year. That provided lots of insights to the chief minister. Officers also felt that for the first time they were getting such a comprehensive picture of the inner workings of government.

Several other bureaucrats also endorsed this saying that this helped create spirit of teamwork. Every department got to know about other departments and the same happened with Cabinet ministers as well. As agendas were set collectively, the secretary of each department was given the space to provide suggestions to other departments in order to bring

about cross-fertilisation of ideas. It also brought synergy since decisions were taken collectively and goals set by consensus. It controlled turf wars and ensured that officers did not obstruct each other's work as often happens in government. The brain storming sessions were long, serious, and intense. Modi would listen intently to each officer and put forward even his own suggestions for discussion. Mishra says:

> The CM's main focus in those days was to speed up and streamline delivery of services. He set the tradition of making systematic long-term plans with set time frames for each department. Even while Modi did hands-on monitoring of each department, at the same time he gave long rope to each department head to take full responsibility and cut out bureaucratic red tape. After a certain road map was agreed upon and the goal set in the presence of all, the chief minister would leave the officer-in-charge free to implement it in his own way. However, just a couple of days before the agreed upon deadline, be it 6 or 8 months, CM would send a message reminding the officer that he had to come and make a presentation. So there was no question of forgetting or letting matters drag. If during the course of implementation, an officer brought to the CM's notice any difficulties or extraneous pressures he was facing, CM would back him fully and help him find solutions. Once a decision was taken by common consensus he never let politicians or other vested interests derail the work. The review meetings for each project were equally intense and thorough so that the officers learnt to come fully prepared.

Making the Old System Work Anew

Just as after becoming CM, Modi did not bring any coterie of officers to take charge of the CM's office or other key portfolios, he also did not bring about any changes in the Cabinet. He retained those who were part of Keshubhai's Cabinet and let the Party decide who they wanted as his ministers. Modi says, that since he had been out of the state for 6 years, he didn't know about the performance calibre of most of the MLAs. Therefore, he told his party leaders, he would work with whatever team they gave him. But he added some more people to the team both in the party as well as in the government departments he considered of key importance. However, he gave clear signals that he was not going to allow the corrupt officers to flourish and dominate the administration as before.

For instance, soon after taking over charge Modi is supposed to have made discreet inquiries to find out who among his officers were of

doubtful integrity, whose tenures had been controversial on account of scams. Most of them were occupying certain key positions for years on end. He consulted some of his ministers as well as the secretary of GAD and asked them for their assessment of those officers. In addition, he got inputs from media friends as well as his own independent sources. With that information in hand, Modi made a list of about a dozen officers- some were secretary level top officers while some were junior IAS officers - and transferred them all in one go to inconsequential positions.

This proved to be a big blast because these officers had seen several CM's come and go; they had such clout that nobody had dared touch them no matter how serious the charges against them. This gave a clear message that Modi would not protect the corrupt. Therefore, some of them, decided to move out of the government to take on other jobs. They were allowed a graceful exit.

Almost all bureaucrats I interviewed said that Modi avoids using threat of punishment, suspensions or dismissals as a way of disciplining the officials. When I asked Modi about it he said: "I believe in giving people chance to improve, that's my *mool sanskar* (root value)." His officers tell me, this tendency to avoid punitive measures has cost him a lot at times because some of the corrupt officers became willing allies of his adversaries and joined the anti- Modi lobbies.

All in all, even though Modi did not start with any dramatic changes and reshuffles in the composition of his cabinet or his bureaucratic team, his work style and his determination to make government an energetic instrument for economic development and social transformation, did come to ruffle many feathers both within BJP as well as in the Congress Party.

CHAPTER 5

Modi's First 19 Weeks as CM
"*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*" in Action

When the Sachar Committee members met and asked me, "Mr. Modi what have you done for Muslims in Gujarat?" I told them: Nothing, I have done nothing for Muslims. But please go on to note that I have done nothing for Hindus or Jains or Sikhs either. I am responsible for 5.5 crore Gujaratis and whatever I do, is aimed at serving the interests of all these 5.5 crore people of my state. When the pure waters of Narmada flow into Sabarmati on account of our river linking project, do you expect me to measure how many litres are consumed by Hindus and how much water goes to Muslim households? My job is to ensure that every person, every household gets adequate supplies of clean drinking water. Please don't expect me to adopt your divisive terminology and vision.
Narendra Modi in personal interview, 2013

The Congress Party and the Left have studiously built a demonology around Narendra Modi alleging that, from the moment he took charge as CM, he began his mission to polarise Gujarat on religious lines and orchestrated the 2002 riots in order to consolidate Hindu votes and force Muslims to live as terrorised second class citizens. Even those who respect Modi's good governance and development record are of the view that Modi turned development-oriented only after he had successfully garnered a solid Hindu vote bank.

Before I undertook this study, I too was inclined to think that Modi kept Gujarat riot-free after 2002 only because he learnt that the 2002 riots had boomeranged on him. However, when I looked closely at Modi's tenure from the moment he took oath as chief minister on October 7, 2001, I realised how completely off the mark I had been.

Anyone who wants to understand the quintessential Modi needs to look at how he defined his political, social, and economic agenda, how he set his priorities, and the programs and reforms he initiated in the

19-odd weeks of his tenure before the outbreak of Godhra and the post-Godhra violence. This was also the crucial period within which he had to win a bye-election (February, 2002) in order to remain chief minister. Politicians usually turn demagogues during election time. But Modi's election campaign as described at length in chapter 8 was not offensive or vituperative . In this chapter, I focus on the priorities unfolded by Modi in the first four months of his tenure.

Modi has repeatedly reiterated that his primary motto is "*sabka saath, sabka vikas*." (Participation of all, for the development of all). One of the distinguishing features of Modi's governance style, as per his officials and political colleagues, is that he does not ever publicly announce any project or programme until the entire road-map has been chalked out to the last detail, and till he has created an appropriate institutional mechanism for the programme's implementation. The timeline for its completion is also fixed in advance. This is true for small as well as big projects. The performance level of various programmes and projects may vary from district to district depending on the officer under whose charge they were executed. But Gujarat doesn't produce high-sounding programmes that stay only on paper or falter and collapse when sought to be implemented.

Among the first things that Modi did after assuming office was to get the Ahmedabad-based Indian Institute of Management (IIM) to devise a special course for him and his officers in order to hone their collective management skills. Since then he has used the IIM's guidance several times to promote professionalism in administration.

Primary Focus on Earthquake Rehabilitation:

In the first 19 weeks Modi travelled extensively to cover literally every district of Gujarat to review the local administration. He brushed aside all ceremonial functions and extravagant receptions that any new chief minister invariably gets invited to.

Since Modi had announced that solving the water crisis and earthquake rehabilitation were to be his highest priorities, in his very first cabinet meeting held on October 8, 2001, he decided that matters relating to energy, the Narmada Dam Project, water supply, earthquake, and centre-state relations would be reviewed at the chief minister's level from the very next day.

Earthquake rehabilitation itself took an enormous amount of Modi's time. He personally visited the areas frequently. During the first 19 weeks,

he convened more than 20 state-level review meetings and several district-level meetings to expedite the rehabilitation process. Even a casual time audit would show that 60 per cent of Modi's time was spent in visiting earthquake-affected areas; the rest went into trying to learn the ropes of administrative work.

A new governance style, which made people active partners in development, was initiated during this very trying period. As a result, the earthquake-devastated and backward desert region of Kutch emerged as the fastest growing district in India—in both industry and agriculture. In my next book, I will also describe the far-reaching systemic reforms Modi set into motion during these first few weeks to make Gujarat overcome its perennial water crisis.

Gram Rajya and *Samras Panchayats*

One of the first decisions that Modi took after assuming office was to make panchayats the key instrument of rural development. On October 11, that is, within four days of swearing-in—and on the birthday of eminent Gandhian leader Jaiprakash Narayan (popularly known as JP)—he announced the *Samras Panchayat Yojana* for creating samras villages. As an active part of the anti-Emergency movement, NaMo had worked closely with JP. He defined 'samrasa' as 'united and cohesive.' A Samrasa village refers to a village where the panchayat is constituted through consensus and not competitive elections. Modi explained its importance saying that he wanted to:

- Unite society, and not divide it.
- Use the energy of the people in a constructive manner.
- Reduce the ill-will created by party-based elections.

Modi's message to the people was: 'Villages are a reservoir of energy. Let's not waste this energy by in-fighting. The Gram Sabha (village assembly) is the only institution which can reach 'unto the last'; it is the best instrument for people's empowerment as well as for social and financial audit of village panchayats. It ensure the involvement of people in the process of development. With the help of samras—where the sarpanch and the Gram Panchayat are elected unanimously—social harmony would be restored, which invariably gets disturbed due to the hostilities created by competitive majoritarian elections.'

Despite much rhetorical commitment to the panchayati raj, most other states in India have yet to bestow meaningful powers to the panchayats.

They remain subservient to the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the political establishment in state capitals on the other. The latter uses them for establishing their political clout in villages and, in the process, lets party politics tear asunder the social fabric in villages. This began changing in Gujarat with firm measures to restore to panchayats some of the powers that are necessary for their effective functioning.

Panchayat elections had not been held in the previous ten years therefore the system was in a moribund state. Within a week of assuming office, Modi began re-tuning the whole administration to revitalise the institution of the Gram Sabha and ensured as many samras elections as possible. The first round of Gram Sabhas was held on October 11, 2001. Modi addressed numerous public meetings to drive home the message that for democracy to become people-centric, a Gram Sabha should have the same importance as the Lok Sabha (Parliament). In order to highlight the importance he gave to Gram Sabhas, Modi mobilised the full power of the political and administrative machinery to galvanise these meetings. NaMo himself began attending the Gram Sabhas physically as well as through video conferencing. All his cabinet ministers, senior bureaucrats, and district officers were also made to attend Gram Sabhas. This tradition continues till date. A minimum of six Gram Sabhas are held every year in each village.

Gram Sabhas were organised in more than 18,000 villages within the first few weeks of Modi's coming to power. Between October 2001 and 2008, they disposed of 92 per cent of the total grievances and conflicts pertaining to infrastructure, resolution of social conflicts, technology, information dissemination, and so on. During the same period, of the village panchayats where elections were scheduled, 7,793 were elected on a consensus basis and were hence declared 'Samras'. The government paid Rs. 65.30 crores by way of incentive to these samras villages.

In 2013, I visited several villages which had elected samras panchayats. They seemed to be working far more actively than those with bitterly-fought elections. One of the reasons you do not find too many disgruntled people in Gujarat villages today is that Gram Sabhas have been given adequate powers to handle many vital functions of their village. Bureaucrats have been given clear instructions that neither they nor the MLAs or ministers should reverse decisions regarding development works decided by Gram Sabhas. This freed development processes from the clutches of politicians, especially those of the ruling party.

That the idea of samras should be given primacy by Modi, a politician demonised as a divisive hate-monger, speaks volumes. In response to the Congress Party's attacks against the politics of samrasta, Modi reminded them in the assembly that they were using double-standards in this matter.

> …For the Rajya Sabha elections, no member of this August House had to take the trouble to cast his vote. Four members were elected unanimously to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat. I congratulate them on behalf of all of you. I wish that they will make constant and sincere efforts for the well-being of Gujarat. I wish to thank my Congress colleagues who, despite opposing the principle of samras [for Gram Panchayats] accepted the same principle for the Rajya Sabha.

This indicates that Modi was not looking for confrontation even with the Congress Party, and preferred rising above partisan considerations on key issues. In my next book, I will provide examples of how, even today, Modi encourages samrasta in village politics and responds to the needs of Congress-dominated municipal corporations and panchayats with as much alacrity as that of BJP-dominated panchayats.[1]

Lok Kalyan Melas: Government at People's Doorsteps

Among the earliest important measures initiated by Modi was to set up a system of providing services to the poor at their doorsteps while building a transparent and accountable system for their delivery. Every state government in India has an endless number of social welfare schemes for the poor—from scholarships for poor children to pensions for widows, to subsidies for building homes or toilets. Unfortunately, a large section of the poor neither gets to know of these schemes, nor do they know how to avail them. This is where corruption seeps in and the bureaucracy siphons off money meant for the poor.

On assuming the CM's role, Modi had asked his officers to make a comprehensive list of all the existing welfare schemes and subsidies for the poor. When the list was brought to him, he asked his officers whether they could give him a clear idea of how an old, uneducated widow or a handicapped person from a poor family could go about claiming what was their due. Apparently, none of the senior officers could provide a

1 In chapter 22 on "Of Trusteeship, Dharma & Compassion," Narendra Modi has explained the source of inspiration behind his emphasis on samrasta.

clear answer because such matters are usually left to the caprices of the lower level staff. He told them, "If those of us who make these schemes can't properly guide a person on how to get the promised welfare benefits from the government, how can we expect the poor and destitute to avail them on their own? Therefore, from henceforth, no poor person should have to come begging for benefits announced for them. The government is going to take them at their doorstep every year—all in one go."

This resolve resulted in institutionalising *Lok Kalyan Melas* (People's Welfare Fairs). They proved to be among the most popular innovative programmes that not only curbed corruption but also introduced the concept of government service delivery at people's doorsteps.

But the ground work involved prior identification of individual beneficiaries through proactive outreach and proper surveys. Senior officers directly supervised the exercise. After a careful scrutiny of the lists of intended recipients of welfare schemes, the chief minister, as well as his cabinet ministers, personally visited various districts to hand over to the selected individuals the welfare benefits by way of cheques or in kind. All this took place in well-attended public functions. This brought in automatic transparency and eliminated arbitrary selection processes and avenues of corruption.

Those who came to receive the cheques or other benefits due to them had to appear before all. The entire public witnessed whether it went to the right person or not. This left much less scope for undeserving people cornering benefits meant for the poor or corrupt officers siphoning off money by showing bogus beneficiaries. This proved a better form of instant public audit than those that rely on catching the corrupt long after money has already been stolen.

Former Chief Secretary Subba Rao says that when the first round of Lok Kalyan Melas were organised starting from the first week of February 2002, Modi told his officials that he wanted mass participation so that the message was clear to all that the government would come to them, rather than they having to go and grovel before government officers. The officers were very puzzled because they thought that organising big mass meetings was the job of politicians, not bureaucrats.

The first Lok Kalyan Mela was organised in Deesa. Everyone was surprised at such mass participation in a government function. The following report published in *The Hindu* on January 5, 2002, by

correspondent Manas Dasgupta, described the first Lok Kalyan Mela held in the tribal district of Banaskantha on January 4:

> The Union Tribal Development Minister, Joel Oram, today announced a special sanction of Rs. 100 crores from the Centre to Gujarat for the welfare of the tribals in the state. The announcement was made at an unprecedented gathering, the Lok Kalyan Mela, held for the first time in the state, and perhaps in any part of the country, in the remote town of Deesa in the border district of Banaskantha in north Gujarat.
>
> Not only was the event unique in terms of bringing the beneficiaries of various central and state government schemes directly in contact with the administration, the turnout of over three lakh people from nearly 1,300 villages and towns in the district surpassed all modest estimates.
>
> The 'mela' a brainchild of the chief minister Narendra Modi to expose the administration to the people, and to inform the ignorant villagers in the remote areas what benefits they could expect and demand from the officials under various schemes floated by the Central and the State government, is intended to be held one in each district in the state.
>
> A large number of people, while visiting various stalls giving details of the government's welfare schemes admitted that they never had any idea about many of the schemes, and so far did not make any attempt to derive benefits from these. It was for the first time that many of the welfare schemes confined to the statute books were brought out in the open and people were educated about how to claim benefits from these.
>
> In addition, 54,721 beneficiaries were disbursed on the spot more than Rs. 49.75 crores as grants under 94 welfare schemes. They were surprised to learn that there were about 200 other welfare schemes floated by the governments under which the eligible could claim benefits. There also were more well-known schemes like the Sardar Patel and Dr Ambedkar Avas schemes, insurance protection, bankable schemes, loan credit, student scholarships, and others of which they were aware but could not derive benefits due to the procedural wrangles.
>
> Immediately after taking over as the chief minister, Mr Modi had floated the idea of holding such melas in each district to bring the people and the administration closer to each other. 'It is time the administration needs to go to people and not the other way round,' Mr. Modi maintained.

The Lok Kalyan Melas have continued year after year till now. They may not have produced foolproof results but they have certainly curbed misuse of BPL (Below Poverty Line) funds and created a system which allows transparency and constant improvements. In some ways, the hands of the State government are tied because the BPL criteria are set by the Centre and have many intrinsic flaws in them.

In most states, BPL families are handpicked by sarpanches and used for doling out patronage rather than helping the really poor. But in Gujarat, the surveys undertaken for identifying beneficiaries are done through a well-defined process by a certain set date every year. Modi, along with his entire cabinet and senior officials, are out in the field on pre-set dates every year to deliver what is due to the poor.

These melas define the characteristic approach of Modi in combating corruption and changing the basic orientation of the government machinery to make it people-centric. Modi avoids using punitive or theatrical approaches—sting operations, suspensions, threats of dismissal—to punish officers. Instead, well thought out systems are put in place through well-crafted institutional mechanisms that bring in transparency and curb the discretionary powers of the bureaucracy that control such funds. The performance of such systems is monitored closely to improve and hone them further as glitches or new challenges arise.

Kanya Kelavani and *Shala Utsav* Programme

These complementary programmes introduced in the first three months of Modi's tenure aim at enrolling every single child into school in a way that makes school admission a happy and memorable experience for the children. The programmes lay a special focus on the girl child. Within a month of assuming power, Modi explained in a press conference that he had set up a special fund called *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Kelavani Yojana* to lend personal support to girls' education by depositing into the government treasury all the gifts he had received thus far after becoming CM and might receive in future. These would be auctioned off and the money given to Kanya Kelavani Fund to give scholarships to girl students in the poorest districts in 100 backward talukas of the state. To quote Modi:

> Today is *Labh Panchami*. I thought that, on this auspicious day, the Gujarat treasury should get some *labh* (profit) through me. After becoming the chief

> minister, I too am government property. In the last few weeks, wherever I have gone I have been offered some gift or the other. Those things don't belong to me; they belong to the people of Gujarat. That is why I thought they should all be deposited in the government treasury. I've requested the government that whatever I'm giving to you should be auctioned at the best possible price and all the money that is collected should go for girls' and women's education. If this money is used for women's well-being, it will give me great satisfaction. The government will soon make arrangements to implement this suggestion.

When a journalist asked how the price of these goods would be decided, Modi replied, "I've never purchased such things. Nor have I looked at them from that point of view. When people give you gifts in public functions, you can't refuse them. I could have distributed them on the streets, but I felt it is best to give them to the government treasury."

Another journalist commented, "We have been informed that ever since the founding of the state of Gujarat in 1960, a total of 164 items have been deposited in the State Treasury but you have deposited 165 items within a month of taking over as CM."

Modi's response was: "I'm not going to comment on what has happened before me because I don't believe in one-upmanship. I'm not doing this because no one else has done this before. I am doing it because this is my conviction. As I've just said, Mahatma Gandhi's principle of trusteeship is what inspires me. That is why I am doing this."[2] The first auction of Modi's gifts raised Rs. 17,00,000. That fund has since then collected nearly Rs. 100 crores worth of gifts and money, and continues to grow—all this in a country where there are known cases of chief ministers who have actually stolen precious antiques from the state treasury.

Modi has led the *Kanya Kelavani* and *Shala Utsav* campaign year after year since 2002. Just before the yearly admissions in the schools, senior officials in charge of various districts fan out to the assigned villages and towns to oversee that local officials and gram panchayat members reach out to the families of all the children who are of school entry age, especially among the poor and marginalised groups and persuade them to enrol their children in school. Then, for three days in the blistering heat

2 For more on NaMo's Connect with Mahatma Gandhi's idea of trusteeship, read chapter 22.

of June, every single year since 2002, the chief minister, all his cabinet ministers, senior IAS, IPS, and other state government officials go and preside over well-attended public functions in different villages where the new school entrants are brought with much fanfare in a procession to a celebratory public meeting. Each child receives free school uniforms, a school kit, including a bag, books, pencils, colour boxes, specially-prepared nutritious chocolates called 'Bal Bhog,' and toys to celebrate their entry into school. Every girl child is also given a Narmada Bond of Rs 1,000 in her name, which can be enchased when she finishes class seven.

Similar programmes are held in urban areas to cover primary schools run by *nagar palikas* and *mahanagar palikas*.

In 2013, I travelled to witness several Kanya Kelavani meetings, which Modi personally addressed from June 14 to 16 when temperature was soaring to 45-46 degrees Celsius. His motivational speech in these events, urging all parents and panchayats to ensure that all children get proper education, is telecast in all the schools. Among the noteworthy things about these events is that ordinary farmers, shopkeepers, milk producers, taxi drivers, etc., donate money for Modi's Kanya Kelavani Fund indicating growing public support for this campaign. Recognising the use he puts his gifts to, in most places I saw people gifting him a thick silver bangle, possibly because it is easy to encash. As a result of consistent efforts, the dropout rate of schools, which was 17.83 per cent in 2002-2004, has come down to 2 per cent in 2012-2013. Female literacy has increased from 57.80 per cent to 70.73 per cent between 2001 -2011.

This target of 100 per cent enrolment and retention has been backed by major improvements in school infrastructure and the performance of teachers. I will deal with this dimension in a subsequent book.

Quality of school education could not have been improved without enough teachers in each school. Soon after Modi took charge, the government recruited 1,20,000 school teachers in one go. The state of affairs in earlier regimes can be gauged by the fact that, in the ten previous years, not a single new teacher had been recruited. Since then, important systemic changes have been brought about to put an end to corruption in teachers' recruitment and transfers by bringing transparency in the processes of merit-based selection and exchange transfers. In a subsequent book, I will describe the measures taken for improving the quality of education in both rural and urban schools.

At the Shala Utsav progammes, I saw Modi presenting a big milk canister to each village with the appeal that each family that owns cattle should pour into that vessel a small portion of their daily milk production as a voluntary gift for the children attending the local *aanganwadi* (the crèches managed by the Child Welfare Department through village panchayats). The canister is placed strategically at the cooperative milk procurement centre of each village. This is not because the government does not provide sufficient supply of quality food for the children who come to these *anganwadis*. Gujarat's *anganwadis*, both rural and urban, are among the best in the country. It is Modi's way of making every social development measure into a mass movement by persuading every family in the village feel responsible for the health of all the children of the village. This appeal has not gone in vain. At Modi's call, wealthy individuals and corporate houses have also adopted many of these *anganwadis*. Even his toy collection campaign for *anganwadis* became a mass movement. He asked his party workers to go from house to house to collect toys as donations. He could well have asked a rich industrialist to donate toys in bulk but by involving lakhs of party workers and ordinary middle class families, he wanted to drive home the message of social responsibility towards disadvantaged groups.

I paid surprise visits to numerous *anganwadis* in the villages: not one of them turned out to be disappointing in terms of quality of food or general infrastructure. I hope to do a more detailed study on this issue in the coming months.

Separate Department for Women and Child Welfare

To mark Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birthday, a dedicated Department for Women and Child Welfare was created on December 25, 2001. Such departments are common in almost every state. However, unlike in most other states, Gujarat's Department of Women and Child Welfare is not a lazy listless bureaucratic institution. It has been forced to become a fighting-fit instrument for undertaking numerous special and well-targeted measures for reaching out to serve vulnerable women and children. Unlike most other chief ministers who treat this as a lightweight inconsequential department, in Modi's scheme of things, it is central to his development model. Even a casual time audit will show that Modi spends more time every year on programmes connected with this department than he does in dealing with industrial policies of the state.

Some of Modi's most effective initiatives and campaigns, such as creation of 50,000 women's self-help groups for better awareness among the rural women; provision of relief in the prison term for women prisoners; and 'Save the Girl Child' campaign were conceptualised and launched in February 2002 itself. To reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, the government of Gujarat launched *Chiranjeevi Yojana*. This went on to win the Asia Innovative Award for its successful implementation. In addition, Gujarat introduced many significant schemes:

- Insurance cover to 1.25 crore students against accidental death under the *Vidya-Deep Yojana*.
- Healthcare for 1 crore children, involving health check-ups, treatment of serious ailments and medical facilities including high-cost surgeries.
- By integrating the medical, fire brigade, and police departments, Gujarat became a pioneer in implementing comprehensive emergency management. As part of disaster management systems, it began the process of setting up an efficient ambulance service backed up by hospital services and primary health care centres. Today, in the farthest village of Gujarat, a well-equipped, air-conditioned ambulance service with appropriate facilities for handling emergencies, including child birth delivery, is available free of cost. It is closely monitored through IT to ensure that it doesn't take more than half an hour to reach even the remotest of villages. The system is now aiming to reduce the response time to 20 minutes. Every little school-going child in Gujarat knows that one should dial 108 for calling the ambulance.

Engagement with Border Areas

Within a few days of becoming chief minister, Modi visited the border areas of Kutch district. He initiated measures with the Central government to bring about better fencing and patrolling of border areas with Pakistan to check cross-border terrorist incursions from Pakistan.

Simultaneously, he made special development plans for the border areas including that of coastal areas. I will describe some of these in my subsequent book. But these visits were not just about "national security" issues - they were also about the well-being of soldiers posted in the desert regions bordering Pakistan and, therefore, operating under very hostile weather conditions. To quote Modi:

> In my first few weeks as CM, I had gone to the border areas to interact with the members of defense forces because I felt it was my duty to let them know I'm there to attend to any problems they might be facing.
>
> I believe that even though defence personnel—army, navy, or air force—posted in my state are central government employees, it is also my job to take care of their needs so that they have a good coordination with the state government.
>
> One of the biggest problems faced by our *jawans* at the border is acute scarcity of water, since the border area in Gujarat is desert land. The Border Security Force (BSF) had to deploy close to 900 camels just for transporting water to the various defence posts. But, as we created the new water grid in the following years, we found a way by providing piped supply of Narmada waters to these border posts. I got to know through those interactions that they find it difficult to get fresh vegetables. The transport cost of bringing vegetables was turning out to be far more than the actual cost of vegetables. So, we created facilities, including regular supply of water for them to grow vegetables around their own border posts. They also had a big problem in accessing telephones. If they used mobile phones, they got connected to Pakistani towers. We got high power telephone towers erected for the Gujarat border to enable our soldiers to remain connected with their families. Earlier, our soldiers could only receive Pakistani TV since Indian TV channels don't reach our border areas. But we provided them with Dish TVs.

Likewise, when Modi found out that in that blistering heat the army jawans did not even have refrigerators for food storage, he came back and organised refrigerators for them. Modi's visits to border areas to assess the needs of soldiers have continued year after year.

On August 15, 2013, I was witness to his celebrating Independence Day with the soldiers manning border posts. He inaugurated a water supply system that brought fresh water of Narmada to the farthest border post. In addition, he also inaugurated, on the Kutch border, the first ever memorial to soldiers in the country built in post-British India. The one at India Gate was built by the British. The Government of India simply put 'Amar Jawan Jyoti' underneath the canopy. Modi says he found that inadequate since, in his view, those who sacrifice their lives for the country need better recognition.

Within first few weeks of Modi's tenure, the coastal areas also saw many new measures to tighten up security in sensitive areas, including joint patrolling with the coast guard.

The Five Nectars of Development

In one of NaMo's early announcements, he declared that the guiding principle of his development agenda would be the *Panchamrut Yojana* or the 'five nectars for development.' These were defined as Jal Shakti, Jan Shakti, Gyan Shakti, Urja Shakti, and Raksha Shakti.

Jal Shakti involves development and conservation of water resources. Since large parts of Gujarat fall under the desert region, Modi inherited a state with perennial water crisis. He had declared that Narmada project would get top priority. In the first 18 weeks, he held nine high-level meetings to review and fast track its progress and speed up the rehabilitation process. Despite determined obstructions by Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan backed by the Congress Party, Modi has battled hard to complete the Narmada Project

But water security was taken up as a mass movement. A special purpose vehicle named WASMO (Water and Sanitation Management Organisation) was created within the first three months of Modi's coming to power in order to promote community management of water resources and sanitation—this was done through the creation of empowered *Pani Samitis* (Water Committees). Today, 70 per cent of rural families, including in the desert areas, are getting piped water supply at home, while Gujarat is moving fast towards 100 per cent coverage. The story of how Modi set about reducing dependence on drawing out ground water through tube wells—a practice that had lowered the water table to dangerous levels—will be told at length in my subsequent book. But initiatives taken by Modi in the first few weeks set into motion enduring changes. Water harvesting, which was taken up as a mass movement began in the first few months of Modi's tenure, has led to the construction of lakhs of *khet talawadis* (farm ponds) and check dams. Consequently, Gujarat is one of the few states where the water table is rising despite it being a rain-scarce region. By 2011, the average statewide increase in groundwater level was 3.62 metres.

This experiment has become a global role model for countries with scarce water resources. The participatory system of managing the supply of drinking water bagged the UN public service award in 2009.

Jan Shakti (mobilising human resources and the inner strength of society): Even a cursory exposure to Modi's working style shows that he converts everything, be it school enrolment programme or water policy reforms, into a people's movement born out of the conviction that without

prajashakti or *jan shakti* (citizens' power), *raj shakti* cannot gain legitimacy or function effectively. Chapters six & seven on the reconstruction of earthquake-affected areas demonstrate this philosophy in action. An offshoot of this was the 'Garvi Gujarat Campaign' to promote the heritage, culture, cuisine, and crafts of Gujarat as major tourist attractions. The plan was to put Gujarat on the tourism map where earlier, it was almost absent. 'Garba festival' was revived to attract tourists in large numbers, cruise services were set up, and adventure and eco-tourism gained priority. Steps were initiated to develop Somnath and Dwarka as heritage links. Sites of national and international significance such as Gir forest, Mahatma Gandhi's birthplace Porbandar, Daman & Diu, etc. were earmarked for focused development to highlight their special significance. My next book will cover some of these in detail.

Gyan Shakti (empowerment through education): The following indicators offer a glimpse of the high priority Modi gave to knowledge production:

- There were 11 universities in Gujarat in 2001. Today, there are 44, including a Children's University and Raksha Shakti University. Gujarat has avoided the set archaic pattern of Indian universities whereby they have become degree-churning factories in poorly-designed social science disciplines without imparting any meaningful life or employment-oriented skills to students. Gujarat, by contrast, invested in opening up new knowledge arenas by introducing cutting-edge disciplines whose expertise is sorely lacking in India. Even the lower-end industrial training institutes in Gujarat are intimately linked to imparting skills required by local industries of the area.[3]
- A decision to set up a Sanskrit University and the State Higher Education Council was taken and followed up with quick speed.

3 Gujarat is today a leader in skill development programmes at all levels. That is why there is hardly any unemployment in Gujarat. According to the report by the Ministry of Labour and Employment for the year 2011-12, Gujarat has lowest unemployment rate in India at one per cent. The supposedly progressive state of Kerala has an unemployment rate of 9.9 per cent. What distinguishes Gujarat from other states is that the outmigration from rural areas and traditional backward regions of Gujarat has been halted due to tremendous advancement in agriculture and industry. At the same time, Gujarat is providing employment to lakhs of migrants from other states whereas Kerala's educated manpower is forced to seek employment opportunities outside the state, especially in Gulf countries.

- Steps were initiated to make the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad—the largest in Asia—a leading institution in medical education.
- Gujarat has ended the need for caste or any other quota for admission to medical and engineering colleges by opening so many new professional colleges that it has surplus seats. It has also given a big fillip to higher education among women, including Muslim women, because families are far more willing to send girls to medical or engineering colleges if it does not involve sending them to places far-off from home. Higher education even in private institutions in Gujarat is far more affordable than in other states of India where huge amounts are demanded by way of capitation fee due to scarcity of seats.

Urja Shakti (harnessing and conserving energy): This led to the Jyoti Gram Scheme that provides 24x7 three-phase power supply in each and every village, and in each and every home—both urban and rural—including those in remote tribal areas. This measure, along with improved water access, played a big role in turning Gujarat's villages and small towns into hubs of small-scale manufacturing activities. The farmers also get assured power through separate lines for a set number of hours every day for agricultural operations. Gujarat has not only been transformed from a power deficit to power surplus state, but has also become a leader in generating wind, biomass, and solar power. How this came about and the transformation it has produced deserves a whole book in itself.

Raksha Shakti: It is interpreted comprehensively to mean security from illness, disasters, anti-social, and anti-national activities. This includes far-reaching health sector reforms to provide preventive and medical care facilities in every village and town, well-equipped hospitals, effective disaster management systems, as well as strengthened law and order machinery to keep anti-social elements at bay. One visible outcome of Modi's emphasis on internal security is that from being a state which had witnessed hundreds of riots in the previous decades, Gujarat has been riot-free after 2002. More of this shall be discussed in later chapters.

In addition to the above five nectars of development, Modi began a massive drive for quality infrastructure development with primary focus on rural areas. As a result, today Gujarat has the best of roads down to the last village.

Bringing investments and industry in backward regions: Simultaneously, Modi began to plan business partnership meets to invite

industrial and other investments in Gujarat, especially to the hitherto backward regions like Kutch.

- Apparel parks were planned for in Surat and Ahmedabad.
- Plans were set afoot to give Surat airport a face-lift to match international standards.
- MOU with Astrakhan was signed in Russia—the first of its kind by any state government in the country—with the support from the then NDA government.
- General Motors declared its plans of expanding its plant with an investment of Rs. 500 crores (US$ 102 million).
- Royal Dutch Shell Company announced an investment of Rs. 5,000 crores (US$ 1 billion) in Hajira port and LNG terminal.
- Indo Gulf Corporation Ltd., a unit of Birla Copper, began the process of setting up a world-class copper smelter in Bharuch.
- A comprehensive policy in the country regarding the establishment of Special Economic Zones was announced.
- A high-powered Gujarat Industrial Promotion Board (GIPB) headed by the CM was constituted to provide fast track and single-window clearance to large industrial units.
- Agreement for a Gas Pipeline Project was signed between M/s Cairn Energy (CEIL) and Gujarat Maritime Board (3.4 million cubic metres of gas would be produced and distributed with an investment of over Rs. 600 crores).
- Resurgent Gujarat Mega Event was organised in February 2002 in quake-affected areas to give a boost to the economic and industrial climate in the region.
- Major reforms in the policy and regulations for cooperatives were undertaken to curb corruption, make their functioning more transparent, and remove needless bureaucratic controls.

This is how the new initiatives were reported in the media. *The Times News Service* published on February 11, 2002: "Prospective investors come calling again." It goes on to say:

> What happens when the economy looks bleak and prospects gloomy? The government takes immediate measures to kick-start the economy. This is exactly what is being aimed at by the Modi government in their three-day resurgent Gujarat programme. And with the United Kingdom being the

> 'partner country' along with top corporates, the state can look forward to some positive prospects. Apart from foreign (mainly UK) delegations, there were quite a few NRGs (Non Resident Gujaratis) and NRIs who have found the whole experience quite exhilarating…Resurgent Gujarat - Business Partnership Meet-2002 was organised jointly by Industrial Extension Bureau of the Government of Gujarat, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry. United Kingdom had joined as a partner country.
>
> A very large number of delegates, technical experts and senior executives of different industries from all over India, high-ranking government officials, delegations from many countries, leading businessmen and industrialists of India participated in that event. Resurgent Gujarat - Business Partnership meet proved to be the seed of Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors Summits.

Five biennial Vibrant Gujarat Summits held so far have helped Gujarat emerge as a global business hub, a preferred destination to live in and to do business, including for Muslims, from other states of India. The swiftness with which the drought- and earthquake-devastated Gujarat was changing can also be gauged by the following *The Times News Network* report on February 5, 2002:

> **Corporates make a beeline for Kutch:** Gujarat is doing in Kutch what it does best—seeking a solution to all its problems through industrialisation and wealth creation. With the feeling running high in official circles that fresh investment in industry is the best way to rebuild Kutch from the quake rubble, it's heartening for the government to find that 34 investors have already pledged Rs 768.87 crores, which is more than the investment made in the past 50 years in the district. And, this could be just the beginning of a rapid industrialisation process in Kutch, riding high on sales tax and an excise holiday declared by the state and central governments. Sources say investment in the next few weeks and months could touch or even exceed the Rs 3,000 crores mark. Big names in the corporate world are trying to acquire land to take advantage of the five-year tax holiday. Out of the 300-odd inquiries made so far, 13 have filed their memoranda, ten have acquired land and eight are such which are in the process of acquiring land. Investment of Rs 2,000 crores would be from known houses like Reliance, LG, and Excel, while the rest would be on a small and medium scale.

> The industrial development of the quake-hit district will be a prime focus of resurgent Gujarat, says Principal Secretary, Industries and Mines Department, I. Mansingh. Principal Industrial Advisor to the Gujarat Government R.J. Shah, who is co-ordinating investment in Kutch, says, 'We have put clearances in Kutch on the fast track.' Of the 34 projects that have been confirmed, engineering units top the list, followed by mineral processing and plastics. He says the process would get a further boost after the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation's three Estates of Anjar, Nagor (near Bhuj), and Mandvi are ready. The government also expects the proposal for a new Special Economic Zone (SEZ) mooted by the Adanis near Mundra port to be cleared by the Centre soon so that the industrial activity picks up in Kutch. Kandla SEZ with an export of Rs 800 crores from 140 units is the only important centre of industrial activity in the district so far….

This is the same region which till then was considered the backwaters of Gujarat's economy and had witnessed large-scale outmigration in the previous decades. The following two chapters describe how people in the earthquake-devastated Kutch experienced the impact of these policies.

Modi's policy of promoting industrial investment or with regard to Narmada Project may not find favour with people from the Left spectrum, but it has certainly found favour with the people of Gujarat. It is not as if the Left- or Congress-ruled states have shunned corporate investments or the setting up of Narmada Dam type of development projects. The only difference is that Modi has brought efficiency and transparency into the industrial and development policy, whereas in the Congress- and Left-ruled states, they are mired in scams and delays. By contrast, there are relatively few controversies within Gujarat regarding Modi's development model. That is why Congress has not been able to rustle up enough opposition within Gujarat to Modi's economic agenda.

Follow-up on Key Decisions

In the very first Cabinet meeting, the following decisions were taken and implemented with speed:

E-governance for Transparent and Efficient Administration: Within days of assuming power, Modi began video-conferencing with collectors. In addition, he personally visited every district of the state for a review of each and every district administration. New departments of Information Technology and Bio-Technology were set up on October

27, 2001, and the process of computerisation and e-governance were set into motion to ensure easy and effective governance. Gujarat State Wide Area Network (GSWAN), the largest IP-based e-governance network in the world, connecting 25 districts of the state to the Secretariat and Gandhinagar and connecting 225 talukas to these districts was put into operation. Satellite communications were set up, enabling productive use of hardware and software technology.

Arrangements were made for tenders for procuring government contracts to be posted online to bring transparency and to curb discretionary awards. From there on, Gujarat went on to introduce e-governance in diverse domains, such as the sanction for building plans, or permission for opening new schools, which in other states work only through bribes and political patronage.

Revamp of PDS: Modi took extensive review meetings of all the government departments responsible for delivering various services to the rural population and urban poor. This effort led to streamlining of the Public Distribution System (PDS), plugging leakages, and synergising various rural development schemes.

Jan Sewa Kendras: All service deliveries began to be computerised and the seeds of e-governance were sowed. The processes that were set into motion led rapidly to the creation of *Jan Sewa Kendras* (Public Service Centres), which provide time-bound delivery of nearly 72 services—from birth and death certificates, ration cards, passports, land registration, to hotel licenses, etc. under one roof so that citizens do not have to run from office to office. Such measures eliminated, in one go, the scope for daily harassment and extortion that ordinary citizens normally suffer in India at the hands of petty officials who have to provide those licenses or services.

Tele Fariyad: A complaint registration system was launched on a pilot basis, wherein people from far-flung areas could lodge their complaints by telephone.

Grievance redressal machinery: An effective grievance redressal system called SWAGAT (literal meaning 'Welcome') was set up whereby, on dedicated days and times, the chief minister personally heard complaints of aggrieved citizens through a well-crafted e-governance process designed to ensure accountability. It is noteworthy that Modi did not go for an imperial *Janata Durbar* of the kind Indira Gandhi used to organise, or the kind of feudal *tamashas* Laloo Yadav and Nitish Kumar popularised.

SWAGAT started with a streamlined system of IT-enabled mechanisms for complaint redressal at the taluka and district levels. If a person does not get justice at those levels, they can write to the chief minister's SWAGAT portal. The concerned officers are then asked for an explanation. If the matter does not get sorted out, the chief minister simultaneously hears the complainant and the officer concerned through tele-conferencing. Often, on-the-spot decisions are taken, or a timeline is set for sorting out the issue. This may include tweaking or changing archaic rules that tie the hands of a bureaucrat in redressing that grievance. People tell me that when citizens occasionally face cussed officials, the very mention that they will use the CM's SWAGAT portal gets things moving. The chief minister's involvement is not fitful; it has been consistent and well-organised over the years. Therefore, the system is not over-clogged with petty complaints. It is open and transparent, and avoids making scapegoats of a select few officials to terrorise others. Equally, it protects honest officers from motivated and malicious complaints. This system won the UN Public Service Award in 2010.

Measures to Deal with Economic Offences: Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Act (GUJCOC) started being enforced with more rigour and seriousness to control organised crime**.** Gujarat Protection of Interest of Depositor's Act was implemented for protection of common investors**.** Qualitative and administrative changes were brought in the functioning of cooperatives through ordinances.

Disaster Mitigation Plan: On February 12, 2002, the Gujarat government decided to set aside Rs. 350 crores to have a full-scale disaster mitigation plan for implementation over the next two years. Since then, the state government has not only included disaster management courses in all schools and colleges, but also set up a fighting-fit system of disaster management to deal with a variety of situations—from earthquakes to fires, accidents, and floods, among others. It has also created new institutions to imbibe and develop new knowledge and technologies in this area. Some of it will be discussed in the chapters on earthquake rehabilitation in Kutch.

PASA Against Land Grabbers: On November 7, 2001, the government announced that it would invoke Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA) against those who have illegally occupied land for commercial purposes and running industries**.** It is noteworthy that there is no mention of illegal encroachments by poor slum dwellers. The district collectors

were directed to initiate action against land grabbers if they did not comply with the warnings by December. It was announced that even politicians, if found involved in land grabbling activities, would not be spared from the dragnet of the law.

Until then PASA had been used sparingly against land grabbers, but under the new dispensation, protection was denied to politcians and other well-connected people. This expectedly made Modi unpopular among a certain breed of politicians, including his own party colleagues.

Media's Silence on Modi's Development Agenda

I have given above small glimpses of the numerous governance reform measures and development programmes launched by Narendra Modi in a mere 19 weeks before the Godhra violence swept the state. All these programmes aim at inclusive development. A chief minister focused on all such programs is the least likely to want riots in his state.

The outcomes of Modi's slogan, *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*, were visible on the ground**.** For instance, when 24x7 power supply was made available to every village home, it is not as if Muslim villages or homes were left out. If the Kanya Kelavani and Shala Utsav programmes aim at 100 per cent enrolment and retention of school-going children, if free uniforms, school books, and other educational materials are meant for each and every child attending school, Muslim children cannot possibly be left behind. If *anganwadis* provide nutritious meals to all children, Muslim children can't remain under-nourished. Since the commitment in each such development programme is towards 100 per cent coverage, it doesn't leave scope for discrimination. It is the politics of quotas that has discrimination in-built into it. From the very onset, Modi's attempt has been to eliminate scarcities, which give rise to the politics of quotas and marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

The Congress Party got into panic because Modi refused to live up to the negative stereotype of a rabid *Hindutva-vaadi* leader who spat fire at the Muslims or Christians. He was neither speaking the language of phobic nationalism, nor mobilising any caste or community vote bank. The way he introduced transparency made it difficult to accuse him of personal corruption, nepotism, or incompetence. Modi's development agenda had, in fact, depolarised the politics of Gujarat. In every speech that he delivered, in every programme that he unveiled, he addressed all the five crore people of Gujarat irrespective of religion, caste, or creed.

And yet the entire spectrum of national media, both print and television, put their services at the disposal of the Congress and the Left parties to launch a tsunami of misinformation peddled by NGOs against Modi and made him into such a hate-object that no one, including the BJP, dared defend Modi firmly. All his good deeds were systematically brushed under mounds of lies they fabricated. No one wanted to give him a hearing. Barring exceptions like Ashok Gulati who researched and wrote on farm sector growth in Gujarat, very few, if any, among academics have bothered to undertake research in Gujarat. With eminent academics becoming part of the demonisation campaign, even young scholars kept away from the state, even while it underwent major transfromation. That is how the web of deceit constructed by NGOs under the guise of defending minorities became not just the dominant but also the only acceptable narrative on Modi and the 2002 riots.

CHAPTER 6

Turning Disaster into an Opportunity
Transformation of Earthquake-Ravaged Gujarat

The entire Kutch was in deep mourning. Every eye was filled with tears. In our small village of 150 homesteads, there were 35 deaths. Before Modi ji, no chief minister, no minister had come to wipe our tears. Our entire village was still covered with rubble and he had to walk over the malba (rubble) of collapsed homes to move from one area to another.After the first few weeks of relief work, everyone had abandoned us...Within three years Modi managed to reconstruct Kutch from scratch. Look at our own house—it has two airy, well-constructed rooms with a kitchen, bathroom, and a big courtyard. It is earthquake-resistant
Parvatiben, Trambo Village, Kutch

One of the surest signs of new prosperity in the once neglected Kutch, is the speed with which prices of land have sky-rocketed. The land that Parvatiben bought 30 years ago for just Rs. 500, is today priced at Rs. 30 lakhs an acre.

When the earthquake hit Gujarat on January 26, 2001, Modi was neither based in Gujarat nor its chief minister. It measured 6.9 on the Richter scale and was one of the worst in 180 years—more devastating than the ones in Latur, Kobe, or Mexico. Its epicentre lay near village Chobari, 30 km from Bhuj. In one go, the shockwaves unleashed a trail of massive destruction causing widespread deaths, injuries, and devastation. Modi's first reaction was to call his mother, which he rarely did. She told him that their *kutcha* mud house in Vadnagar had also been damaged in the earthquake. During the course of an interview, Modi had described how he could not hold himself back from rushing to Gujarat on hearing about the earthquake despite the fact that Keshubhai had politically banished him from the state:

> The news of the earthquake moved me very deeply. So, on my own initiative, I immediately set out for the earthquake-affected regions. Atal ji was in the

January 26 parade in Delhi at that moment. As soon as the parade got over, he called for me to ask if I had any news of the earthquake. I said all I knew was what my mother had told me on the phone from our village, but I thought I should leave for Gujarat. He agreed and said that I should go. Advani ji was also travelling to Gujarat. So, I went with him in his plane and headed straight for Kutch.

At that time, I didn't have smooth relations with Keshubhai. My visiting Gujarat was politically not very sound. But hearing of so many deaths and so much devastation, I could not stop myself from reaching out to people in the affected regions.

I stayed in the villages of Kutch for about a month and did whatever little I could on my own steam. For example, I saw that a lot of people had serious injuries. It was also very cold. I gave people a simple suggestion that at night they should use the waste materials lying around to heat some water and fill it in empty Bisleri bottles. Put this hot water bottle in your blanket when you prepare to sleep. This will give fomentation for your injuries and also keep you warm. This really caught on, and all over the region, people began using this technique. Their houses had collapsed. They were sleeping in the open. Even those whose houses were still standing erect did not dare sleep indoors because of continuing aftershocks.

I also noticed that there were no physiotherapists. This is when thousands of people had broken bones. So, I advised the government teams working on relief to teach primary physiotherapy to all NCC students. They implemented this suggestion to good effect. After the basic treatment, a person with injuries needed to practice certain basic exercises, which could be easily done with the help of a new crop of amateur physiotherapists I helped train.

On becoming chief minister on October 7, 2001, Narendra Modi announced that rehabilitation of earthquake victims and reconstruction of the devastated regions would be his top priority. He says, "I felt morally burdened by the fact that people still had no homes. They were living on footpaths, or in fields. Winter was approaching and Kutch winters are very severe. What were people going to do? This worry was overwhelming me. So I focused maximum attention on infusing new life into those devastated areas."

Anyone who wishes to know the quintessential Modi needs to study how he honoured his promise to the earthquake-affected people—both in letter and in spirit. Kutch and other worst-affected regions also happened

to be among the most backward and impoverished regions of Gujarat, known for distress outmigration, water scarcity, and perennial droughts. Modi transformed these neglected and backward regions into vibrant industrial hubs along with rapid agricultural advancement. Kutch became Modi's laboratory for people-centric growth model and for redefining the role of government vis-a-vis people. Here is a glimpse into the devastation caused by the 2001 earthquake:

- It affected an area of 1,82,639 sq. km.—more than the geographical area of Assam and West Bengal put together. It released energy equivalent to 45,00,000 tons of TNT approximating to over 300 Hiroshima-type bombs.
- As many as 13,805 people lost their lives; 7,633 villages were adversely affected. All the towns of Bhuj and other towns of Kutch were totally destroyed.
- Around 1,67,000 people had been injured while more than 1,800 health facilities had been destroyed.
- Over 12,00,000 houses had been damaged or totally destroyed and needed rebuilding. Large number of high-rise and low-rise buildings, including government offices and hospitals, collapsed.
- Over 10,000 small and medium scale industries went out of production; 50,000 artisans lost their livelihoods.
- Over 50,00,000 people needed immediate relief.
- Power supply, water supply, telephonic and other communications were disrupted.
- Infrastructure was in shambles. Roads, railway tracks, water and power supply networks had collapsed. A total of 592 public buildings were totally destroyed; 8,131 were partially damaged.

Even though the immediate response of the Gujarat government, and the world community at large, was to reach relief materials and rescue teams with a degree of urgency but, after the local and international relief teams departed, the government performed very poorly on the rehabilitation front. Keshubhai had created the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA), a dedicated agency to coordinate a comprehensive earthquake recovery programme and to administer the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and rebuilding initiatives. But he could not make it deliver what it promised.

This is what Rajubhai, an Ahmedabad-based Muslim taxi service owner and a very astute political observer, told me during one of my trips to Kutch as we travelled through villages of the region in 2013:

I made several trips to Kutch following the earthquake because I used to bring journalists, NGO workers, etc. in my taxi. It was shocking for me to witness how Keshubhai and his ministers indulged in open loot and stole even the relief material that came for the poor earthquake victims. Even the collectors at that time indulged in a good deal of partiality in distributing relief material.

For instance, one day I had gone to Malia village with a trader's association. They were assigned Devadia village for distribution of the relief material they had brought with them. Right in front of us, in Malia, a large cold-chain container arrived with foreign chocolates and a lot of other foodstuff. Whoever brought in stuff for relief went to the District Collector, who in turn assigned to some official the village where those food items needed to be distributed. Those who were inclined to pilfer did so at the collector's office itself.

On that particular day, soon after this big container of foreign food stuff arrived, Keshubhai reached Malia in his Cielo car accompanied by a whole caravan of vehicles. He enquired about the contents of the container. When he came to know it had foreign chocolates and other such goodies, he ordered the officials to take out the boxes and put them in his car. Right in front of us, he loaded his Cielo with as many cartons of foreign chocolates as he could and drove away to Gandhinagar. People were shocked at the brazenness of it all. The police constable who was standing guard at the collector's office commented, "These politicians think they have the first right over whatever comes."

I also witnessed how M.P. Ratilal Varma, who is a native of Ranpur, took away the fancy green-coloured tents that had come from Pakistan for earthquake relief. He liked them so much that he went and put up one such tent at his petrol pump to show it off to people. This shameful photograph was even splashed in some newspapers. At that time beggars from neighbouring states also descended in Kutch to collect relief materials that came for the quake victims. But the most shameless beggars were some of our own politicians. They really indulged in brazen loot. A lot of good NGOs had also come and did very good work. I travelled with some of those as well. Among those who did excellent work were Sikh Gurudwaras, Murari Bapu's NGO, and the organisation of Dangre ji Maharaj.

Equally important, Gujaratis in general, and the people of Kutch settled overseas, had come forward in abundant measure to help the shattered families of the affected region. Retired Indian Forest Service Officer R.K. Sama, who played a key role with NGOs in the relief work, provides an insightful glimpse:

There is something special about Kutchis; even those who have migrated out of Kutch for three generations keep very close links with their homeland and their villages. No matter how wealthy and well-settled a Kutchi may be in far-away America or Europe, he will always maintain a house in his ancestral village and stay connected with the happenings in Kutch. They are not just talkers, they are big doers. Let me give you a concrete example. There is a very wealthy Kutchi mercantile house in Oman named Khimji & Sons. He is one of the richest in Dubai and Oman. He flew in his private plane. Since the NGO I was working with was making inventories of relief materials being received as well as what was needed, he asked us to provide him a list of things required immediately. We quickly prepared a list of what we thought was required. All other phone lines were dead but he had a satellite phone with him. Within four hours he told us that what we asked for had already left Dubai, and that the next morning the ship would land in Kandla port. We were told to take care of customs clearance. A couple of weeks later when we assessed the value of the relief material he had sent us, we realised it was worth Rs. 85 crores—all of it purchased and dispatched within four hours. That day I learnt an important lesson: a man who cannot give cannot be considered rich. The habit of giving has to be cultivated consistently over time, which is something the Kutchis have in abundant measure. When I expressed my appreciation and thanks to Khimji for his generosity, he replied: "Please do not embarrass me. There is no place for thanks in this. In fact, I have called to tell you that I am waiting for you to tell me what more is needed. I am ready to send whatever else you need."

There is another incident, which is very revealing about the Kutchi character. One day, we prepared 4,000 food packets and took them to Jawahar Nagar, one of the worst affected areas. When we tried distributing it, the people there refused saying, "We have received our share. Please go to the next village because they haven't received their share." A sense of social responsibility among citizens actually counts for far more than the government efforts. Several international agencies also came for relief work and we NGOs did a good job of working in a coordinated manner by creating a joint forum. And yet, barring a few pockets where good officers took personal initiative, the government rehabilitation work was chaotic, fitful, and disorganised under Keshubhai.

After Modi Took Charge

Modi's very first official meeting was about earthquake relief. It started with a review of rehabilitation work in various districts. The next day he left for Kutch. This is how Modi recounted how he put into motion a new

work culture for the government and tried communicating his sense of caring to the people:

> On my very first trip to Kutch as CM, I stayed there for three days on end. I went to each affected village and town and asked people to tell me why according to them things were in such a sorry state eight months after the tragedy had struck. But I did not allow any official or private receptions to take place. I instructed the local administration in advance that they were not to issue a single advertisement to welcome me.

Some of the officials who had accompanied Modi on this trip told me, the bureaucracy was forced to change its work culture because Modi observed very strict discipline. Earlier, if a CM fixed 10 a.m. as the time for a meeting, he would rarely come before 12. Modi is of the kind who arrives at 09.45. So the officers had to reorient their work styles.

Modi's personal conduct conveyed important messages in small but significant ways. For instance, he told them not to make any food arrangements for him. As a rule when he goes touring, he avoids lunches being hosted for him, barring in exceptional circumstances. This is because, if the district administration has to organise lunch for the CM, they end up inviting the entire *sarkari* clan and it eventually ends up being a gala feast for 500-600 persons. He knows that they don't have budgetary provisions for such feasts. Therefore, officials end up taking personal obligations by asking some businessman to sponsor the lunch. Taking such an obligation also amounts to corruption. Therefore, he told his officials to avoid doing any of that. He carried his own lunch box. This also saved a lot of time because big luncheon feasts tend to take hours and the entire administration comes to a standstill for that period.

Another change he introduced, in that very first trip, was to let the district administration know that they should not collect the entire *sarkari* brigade to hover around him. The general practice used to be that when a CM would visit, all the officials would hang around with a pile of files in hand not knowing what question the CM will ask from which department. There is an atmosphere of terror surrounding such visits. Modi told them, "I will let you know in advance which particular department I need answers from. Then, too, only the department head should be available. There's no need to have an entire contingent from that department waste their time hanging around."

Another incident that sent a strong message about his agenda as CM was that on his very first visit to the earthquake-ravaged Kutch, which took place within three-four days of his assuming office, he suspended some of the tainted sarpanches and officials who had indulged in corruption in relief work. He says:

> I've no idea how I took that decision because I'm not the kind to operate in Robin Hood style. But the matter touched me deeply. This gave a clear message to the entire administration that on such humanitarian issues, there would not be any let-up. My basic priority was the empowerment of the people. During my first three-day visit to Kutch, I tried to understand what was delaying rehabilitation work. I was told: "Sir, this can't be done, that is not possible because rules don't permit XYZ."

On his return, Modi called a meeting of the concerned officers, which included secretaries of all departments who had to contribute in some way or the other to the earthquake rehabilitation work—be it irrigation, housing, power supply, roads, or buildings. He told them that local officials were complaining about too many bureaucratic bottlenecks, which made it impossible for them to deliver results on the ground. He then asked the state government officials in-charge of rehabilitation departments to explain where exactly they stood at that point. What was their road map? Modi described that first meeting as follows:

> Their presentation was centred on all that they planned to deliver by the end of the financial year, namely March 31, 2002. I told them that they should get this financial year business out of their heads because on January 26, the national and international media would descend in Kutch and subject Gujarat to critical scrutiny. In such a situation, we had to fast-track all that needed to be done so that we could give a good account of ourselves to the whole world.
>
> The officials were asked to advance their March plans and to tell me what they could deliver by December 31. Each one came up with a fresh schedule and a fresh target date. But I wondered how much they could deliver in two-and-a-half months, since we were having this meeting in October. As is my habit, all these problems weighed in my mind even when I went home at night. Early morning I called the chief secretary and asked him to meet me at 9 a.m.
>
> When he came, I told him to make a list of the affected talukas. The total number was 38. I told him to put down the most adversely affected talukas at

the top and grade them A, B, C, and D according to the level of destruction. He brought that list in an hour or so. I then told him to give me the names of the most efficient officers so that I could make them responsible for the worst affected talukas. I then called a meeting of those officers and told them that from that day onwards each of them should consider themselves as the chief minister of the taluka assigned to him or her. They would have the full authority to take whatever decisions they thought necessary with regard to those areas. They were told not to hesitate to take snap, on-the-spot decisions, and do what they felt was right, and that I would back them fully even if they inadvertently made some mistakes in the process. You would be surprised to know how much this energised the officers. They were asked to go and stay every Friday to Sunday in the taluka under their charge. The 'C' grade villages, which were relatively less affected, did not need that kind of intense monitoring. So they were handled as per normal routine.

Each of these officers went and spent three days over the weekend in their assigned talukas and I held a review meeting with them on Monday at 11 a.m, In the very first Monday review meeting, they lamented, "Sorry sir, nothing can really move because we had earlier imposed wrong rules." They admitted that the circulars listing rules and regulations regarding rehabilitation measures issued from Gandhinagar were such that even well-intentioned officers could not deliver very much under those circumstances. I had heard similar things from local people and district officials that government rules obstruct rather than facilitate the work. For instance, people were expected to produce XYZ certificate or documentary proof to claim relief. Most people didn't have such documents because their homes were totally devastated.

This is the *mool prakriti* (basic nature) of all governments—to look for ways not to give to people what is their due. I had heard all such complaints already and I was searching for an answer. So when I told them that I make each one of you the chief minister or CEO of that area, they themselves identified the problem correctly and admitted that their earlier GRs (Government Regulations) were all wrong. They were designed to obstruct and deprive people rather than deliver. I said, now that you know where the shoe pinches, it is your duty to modify the very rules you made. Come back to me by Thursday with all the modifications you require. But remember, your modifications should not be contrary to our basic policies.

They all reported on Thursday with the changes required in government rules. I told them that by the end of this day, let us issue new GRs so that they can go and implement them by Friday, since they were to be in their taluka

from Friday to Sunday. When they came back on Monday from their field trips, they all said confidently, "Sir, we are now confident of delivering."

So this is how, by paying attention to the nitty-gritty, we created a whole new system. I had become CM on October 7 and, by October 15, I had already started chalking a new path for the government. And all these officials spent three days a week in the field in the midst of earthquake-affected people week after week till we began to see actual results on the ground. So enthused was the bureaucracy by this new work culture that some Christian officers came on their own and said that they would not take a break for Christmas that year. I used to hold them up as an example in many of my public meetings in order to inspire others.

Restoring People's Confidence in Government

As mentioned earlier, Modi had become chief minister when the anger and estrangement against the BJP government was at an all-time high. In order to mobilise the inner strength of people, he needed to reach out to them and give them confidence in the sincerity of the government. The gesture he made was both dramatic and effective.

To quote him, "Within days of taking over as CM, I announced that this year we will not celebrate Diwali. My entire government—all the ministers and officials—will go and stay in the earthquake-affected villages, where people still had no houses. We will stay in tents." This had a profound emotional impact, which touched people very deeply when they found the government officers and ministers sitting among them, joining prayer meetings and *bhajan kirtan* (devotional songs)—focusing especially on those villages where the toll of deaths was higher and where the earthquake had caused excessive devastation. Modi himself went to the worst affected villages. He says:

This emotional gesture was meant to communicate that their pain was our pain. That is how we channeled people's grief. However, during the Navaratris, which come before Diwali, I had taken a slightly different approach to help people come out of their shock and grief. I asked the collectors and district development officers (DDOs) of those areas to make special arrangements to celebrate Navaratris. This sent out positive vibrations since Navaratris holds a very deep significance in the life of Gujaratis. Diwali is celebrated in each individual household. People who had lost family members were in a state

> of mourning and would not have wanted any celebration in their houses. But Navaratris is celebrated collectively in the public domain. That is why I said that I too will not celebrate Diwali. I will go and stay with the mourning families and eat with them. We stayed there for two days. Once they felt that the government really cared, they put behind all their complaints and joined hands with us to put the tragedy behind them.

I visited some of the villages where Modi went on the occasion of Diwali in 2001. Here is an account from two of the worst-affected villages—Chobari and Trambo.

Modi's Visit to Grief-Stricken Chobari Village

Chobari[1] was the epicentre of the killer quake. Here, 555 people (ten per cent) out of a total population of 5,000 perished on that fateful day. Apart from the 550-plus dead, numerous people had received serious injuries—some had suffered fractures, others had lost their limbs. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, they were airlifted to Mumbai and Ahmedabad hospitals but thereafter, the rehabilitation work under the Keshubhai regime was put in a limbo. All the houses, shops and buildings had collapsed and were reduced to rubble. But, miraculously enough, the welcome gate of the village remained intact. Today, Chobari has 80 Muslim households 1,600 Ahir families, 400 Rabaris, and 300 Dalit families. In addition, there are Vanias, Lohanas, etc., who have about 500 households each. This was one of the villages where Modi spent a considerable amount of time on Diwali, on November 14, 2001. S.K. Soni, Deputy Director, Information Department in Bhuj, who witnessed that visit, says:

> The CM sat in the village square (*chauraha*) and joined in a prayer meeting. Even though people were very angry with the government, there were no protest demonstrations or slogan shouting against Modi when he visited these villages. Over 3,000 people gathered for his prayer meeting in Chobari.

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1 The name Chobari comes from an ancient and unique rectangular well within the compound of an equally ancient and historic Shiva temple. Lore has it that the temple dates back to the *Mahabharata* time and was built by the Pandavas. The temple compound has an amazing array of ancient Sati idols and other carvings.

> The atmosphere was one of total calm—unlike the hustle-bustle that is the hallmark of official visits.

Bharatbhai Joshi, a local astrologer of Chobari, says:

> When we got to know that the CM was coming to Chobari, we wondered at what venue we could organise that meeting given the chaotic state we were living in. Then, by consensus, it was decided that it would be in the Shiv mandir compound since it belonged to the whole village and could accommodate large numbers who were expected to come for the meeting.

Having been incessantly fed the propaganda about Hindu-Muslim divide in Gujarat, my reflex action was to say, but Muslims wouldn't have come to a mandir? Why did you pick on the mandir compound? As soon as these words escaped my lips, I felt embarrassed looking at the incredulous expressions on their faces. One of the villagers posed a counter question to me, "Why would Muslims not come to a mandir? This is not how people live in this village. We all go to mandirs and we all go to masjids too."

Bharatbhai said that Muslims of their village also used 'Ram Ram' as their greeting. To embarrass me further, he added, "Why do you talk this divisive language? We are surprised that you Delhi people think in those terms." The way Chobari residents freely went into each other's homes, the ease with which leading Hindus of the village took me to the homes of Muslims late at night, provided enough evidence that their village had retained the old bonds of *bhaichara* (brotherhood).

While the historic Shiv mandir of that village had collapsed, the Shiv *linga* had remained totally unharmed. Modi came, performed Shiv puja in the temple, and held a prayer meeting within the temple compound. The place at which Modi performed Shiv puja has become another memorable spot for the village. He made it a point to visit Dalit and Muslim households even though these two communities had participated equally in Modi's prayer meeting held within the precincts of the temple. He inspected the damaged fields, bore wells, etc., and spent over half a day in this village alone. He also lit a lamp in the chowk in the memory of those who had died. So it wasn't a touch-and-go VIP visit.

From a population of over 5,000 in 2001, today Chobari has 10,000 residents. Ramji Mariya**,** a young and enterprising Dalit farmer, who is also a semi-professional photographer, was among the most articulate in

describing what Modi's visit meant to the village. He showed me several photographs he took of Modi's visit and gave the following account:

> During the course of that meeting in which Modi listened to the local people instead of giving a speech, correspondent Dhimant Purohit of Aaj Tak TV channel asked Modi, "Today, the country is lighting lamps and celebrating Diwali, but you have come here. What is your message to the people?" He asked this question thrice. But Modi could not complete his sentence in response to Dhimant's question because he was choked with tears. Narendrabhai started three times saying, "While the rest of the country has lighted *diyas*, so many *diyas* of this village have been extinguished." As he said this, tears rolled down his eyes and he could not speak one more sentence because he was so overwhelmed by the grief around him.
>
> He spent hours listening to people about their problems and went around the different segments of the village, including the Dalit and Muslim households. He paid special attention to what women had to tell him and assessed the overall situation for himself. In Chobari, we don't live in segregated *bastis*. People of all castes and communities intermix freely and live in common neighbourhoods though there are areas where there is a larger concentration of one or the other caste or community.

This is what he had to say about the new systems and processes implemented by the Modi-led government that helped speedy reconstruction:

> Before Modi ji came, the entire village was still in a state of shock and grief. The first thing he focused on was to get the village cleared of the mounds of debris that were still lying around as a daily reminder of that tragedy. Till then, only a negligible amount of work had started in the direction of rehabilitation. Modi ji personally checked every street, every *gali* of this village. He fast-tracked everything by putting the whole machinery to work in an emergency mode. We were immediately provided solid temporary shelters to protect us from winter chills. Till then we were living in the open, with the sky above as our ceiling. Many didn't even have tents till then. We had received plenty of relief by way of food, clothes and even some small cash dole but we had no real shelters.

Several villagers joined in to describe how in that meeting everyone cried and Modi cried with them. After listening to the villagers for several

hours, his message was: "Please don't give in to pessimism. Your village will rise again and you will prosper as never before."

Trambo Women Recount Modi's Diwali Visit

Another village visited by Modi on Diwali of 2001 was Trambo, which was also the epicentre of the earthquake. Out of the 450 houses in this village, 400 were razed to the ground while the remaining were damaged to different degrees.

One of the first persons I talked to at length was Parvatiben, because people in the village directed me to her house as the respected matriarch of the village. Her house was totally destroyed during the quake and she too narrated similar stories of neglect as I had heard in Chobari. Nine months had passed since the D-Day, but they were still living in tents or makeshift shelters. The disaster was doubly-hard on her because she was widowed 40 years ago and has brought up her children as a single parent. However, for her, the traumatic memory of that disaster is mixed with the proud recollection of Narendra Modi having visited her makeshift shelter and partaken the modest meal of *bajri roti* and chilies cooked by her neighbour. One of her proud possessions is the fading newspaper photograph of Narendra Modi eating the food that she served him.

The caption underneath the photograph reads as follows: *Tum chinta na karo, pura desh tumhare saath hai*. (Please don't worry; the whole country is with you). She says:

> The entire Kutch was in deep mourning. Every eye was filled with tears. In our small village of 150 homesteads, there were 35 deaths. Before him, no chief minister, no minister had come to wipe our tears. Only Narendra Modi came.
>
> Our entire village was still covered with rubble and he had to walk over the *malba* (rubble) of collapsed homes to move from one area to another. After the first few weeks of relief work, everyone had abandoned us. The only ones who came to help were the volunteers of Ram Rahim Sant (the Sacha Sauda sect of Punjab). They are the ones who saved us from the severe winter by providing us tents and also gave us three months of provisions. We also got help from people of this area settled in Mumbai. They had sent us truckloads of relief material, including food. We got adequate supplies of ration, etc. but the task of rehabilitation and helping us start our lives afresh began with the coming of Narendra Modi.

He went around the village and realised that houses could not be reconstructed at the same location because the old village was very densely located. He wanted these villages reconstructed to give them the benefits of planned development with all possible civic amenities—piped water, sanitation, open spaces, community centres, proper *anganwadis* and schools with playgrounds along with power, internet connectivity, and all else.

Within 15 days of Modi ji's visit, bulldozers came and cleared the *malba*. While our houses and villages were being rebuilt from scratch, the government provided us with tin roofs. Modi ordered the school and health centres be given first priority in the reconstruction process. Next in priority was providing proper water supply system. Bore-wells were dug and water tankers began to reach every village. Each family began getting a monthly cash grant of Rs. 2,000.

An old Harijan of our village had lost four members of his family—his son, his brother's son, wife, and daughter. He was totally devastated because while his son had died earlier, he lost both his grandsons in the earthquake. But Modi ji sat on the same cot as him and said, "Bapu, don't be afraid, I am also your son." Such a sentence can only be spoken and meant by someone like Narendra Modi. And he was true to his promise, not just to the old man, but to all of us. That old man is no more. But his family lives in nearby Rapar.

When we offered him food, he did not touch anything other than *bajri roti*, *mirchi,* and *chhachh*. We had prepared *dhokla*, etc. but he only had *roti* and *chhachh*. [The food Modi ate in Parvatiben's tent was actually cooked by a Harijan woman, the neighbour of Parvatiben]. My neighbour's wife had made some *pedas* for him but he did not even touch those. He also refused to drink milk and did not let us put some *ghee* on the *roti*—he ate just plain *bajri* with red chilies and *chhachh*. This is because he had come to apply balm on our wounds and understood that we were all grieving and it was no time for eating *mithai*.

That day itself I said in my heart, such a chief minister is next to God. Within three years he managed to reconstruct Kutch from scratch. Look at our own house—it has two airy, well-constructed rooms with a kitchen, bathroom, and a big courtyard. It is earthquake-resistant. Earlier, we lived in mud houses. There was an earthquake in 1998 also. At that time, no one had bothered to even look at us or find out how many died. But this time families got due monetary compensation for members who died as well as those who were injured. I have four sons and each one of them got a separate house for their families.

Mobilising the Inner Strength of Society

Modi not only re-oriented and re-energised the bureaucracy, as with everything else, he tapped into the inner strength and creative energy of his own Gujarati society. To quote him:

> The reconstruction work that had to follow was of mammoth proportions. I will narrate an interesting incident from the days of relief work in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. It provides a valuable insight into the nature of our society. A lot of foreigners had come for the relief work. They were well-organised and worked very systematically. Between five and six p.m., they would wind up the day's work, have a bath, and return to their tents. So I used to go and chat with them after they had finished the day's work. Among many other stories, they shared these two experiences with me. They said, "We travel to many countries in the world. In all those places, relief work is generally confined to organisations like Red Cross and WHO. We are surprised to find that in Gujarat, every *gali*, every mohalla has a voluntary organisation. Some are cooking food for others, some distributing milk. We are seeing such a *samaj* (society) for the first time; we have to do very little here because people are doing so much of the required work themselves."
>
> This is the inner strength (*shakti*) of our society. We need to understand and tap into this *shakti*. When I returned as CM, that thought had stayed with me. Hence, while undertaking the reconstruction work, I made sure to channelise this asset. I had also made up my mind that we won't do shoddy reconstruction. We will set high standards. I was very strict on that count and it paid us big dividends. The entire infrastructure you see in Kutch today is far better than in the rest of Gujarat because so much was built from scratch.
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> I appealed to village people to pay highest priority to building good schools. I was convinced that if we could make the children happy, the rest of the families would also return to normalcy. So we managed to fast track the rebuilding and reopening of schools.
>
> Instead of going through the usual government process of inviting tenders and hiring contractors to construct school buildings, we opted to make a village committee and hand over the building plans to them. We created 'material banks' for supplies of cement, steel, etc. The village committees could take all they required from the nearby 'material bank' without any payment. These six-member village committees included the sarpanch, a teacher, and other members chosen by the village. We handed over the money for school reconstruction to them, in addition to supplying free building materials. Since

full authority was given to village committees, they were committed to doing a good job because all this was for their own children.

I can say with confidence that these school buildings turned out to be far better than what could have been constructed by the government through the usual process of tenders, rules, regulations, and contractors. Where we expected one-room construction, they managed two. Where they were short on space, villagers voluntarily donated land for the new schools. The schools constructed by village committees are far better in terms of quality than the earlier government-constructed schools. This is how we converted the Kutch tragedy into an opportunity. You will be surprised to know that the village committees did this work with such integrity that many of them returned the excess money to the government. This in itself was deeply moving.

This is our *mool sanskriti* (root culture), and if we can tap into it, we can achieve a lot. Thus, by January, we had succeeded in bringing about a major transformation in the ground situation. That is when I decided to make a comprehensive presentation to the prime minister through video-conferencing. As you know, it is my nature to use the available cutting-edge technology. So I worked out my presentation accordingly. Next, I invited all the Embassies in Delhi on the nights of January 23 and 24 and gave them a detailed account of how we had utilised funds or materials provided to us by each country. I expressed my appreciation and gratitude to those countries and described to them all that we had been able to achieve with their help.

On January 26, the entire country's media was in Gujarat and after one year, they actually praised the work of the government and acknowledged that the work was heading in the right direction, though there may have been minor lapses here and there. This gave a major fillip to the self-confidence of our officers. They had taken a lot of flak for the first eight months. The positive response and praise they got gave them more strength to work hard. They saw that the strategy of advancing from March to end-December, and taking a pro-active approach in presenting our report card, had paid off well.

Creative Use of Social Organisations

P.K. Mishra, an IAS officer who is today acknowledged as a leading authority on disaster management on account of his experience of handing the Kutch rehabilitation, writes in his book that a joint platform of NGOs called *Abhiyan* came to play an important role in the earthquake relief and reconstruction. It set up resource centres named *Setu* (bridge) for each cluster of 25 villages to facilitate information linkage between

the government of Gujarat and local communities. These Setus gathered information from the villages under their charge and transmitted to *Abhiyan* once in a week, or once a fortnight. *Abhiyan* provided necessary guidance and solutions to the Setus. Wherever necessary, the information was passed on to the government so that relevant issues were addressed speedily. At the peak of the reconstruction work, 33 Setus covered 400 villages.

In Bhuj, an NGO named the Bhuj Development Council played an important role in the process of town planning. It set up small offices at eight locations in the walled city, with personnel and computers, and displayed their plans. The affected people could file objections and offer suggestions. This NGO interacted regularly with the planning consultants and government agencies. Similar efforts were made in Bhachau and Anjar.[2]

IAS officer Mansingh, who was appointed as the secretary (Rehabilitation), was instrumental in enabling NGOs and a range of religio-social organisations to work in unison. Eighty such organisations adopted 285 villages in five districts for construction of houses. R.K. Sama, a retired government officer, also played a vital role in the synergising NGOs who took on rehabilitation work in Kutch. He provides the following insightful account:

> It was at the persuasion of Mansingh that I accepted the responsibility even though I did not have any experience of rehabilitation work. He persuaded me saying, "You have done well in relief work. If you can help set up a model for NGOs on how to do effective rehabilitation, it will improve the quality of their work. Since you have recently retired from the government, you can act as an effective link between the government and the NGOs." I told Mr. Mansingh that I would take on only that amount of work for which money would be released to me within four-five days. And I was surprised when we got nearly Rs. 80 crores sanctioned within four-five days from the funds that had come from HDFC, Hindustan Lever, *The Times of India*, and the Government of Israel.
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> I will give you an example of how policies were speedily revised and improved upon after Modi came in. During Keshubhai's time, a very faulty

2 Pramod K. Mishra, *The Kutch Earthquake 2001: Recollections, Lessons and Insights* (New Delhi: National Institute of Disaster Management, 2004), p. 163.

policy decision had been taken that in the new villages being reconstructed, families would be given plot sizes according to their economic status. Those who had bigger landholdings were to get a bigger plot of land.

Four different categories were created through a GR. I was against this GR from the very beginning for the simple reason that the livelihood of those who were dependent on agriculture had not been affected. Villagers had only lost their homes and not their fields. I was of the opinion that every family should be provided proper shelter with no differentiation between the size of the plot or the size of the newly-constructed dwelling unit. As soon as the matter reached Narendra Modi, a new GR was issued in no time and the policy speedily was revised.

The government ensured that we got the required infrastructure support, such as water and electricity, for constructing homes in villages. The system of local coordination, headed by IAS Officer Mr. Maheshwar Sahu, was excellent. I was in-charge of constructing 52 villages, which meant nearly 10,000 houses. Sahu held coordination meetings with all the NGOs twice a week. Whatever problems or hitches arose, were resolved on the spot and a fresh GR would be issued within 24 hours. Modi sahib had given orders that whatever decision was taken by the district collector in response to the requirement of the affected people would be instantly translated into GR from the state capital. Two senior officers in-charge of this work—Mr. Mansingh and Mr. Maheshwar Sahu—had full authority to take spot decisions in order to avoid delays—just that the order had to be issued from the local collector's office. This is how everything was put on fast track. The close coordination made possible by genuine devolution of powers resulted in Gujarat doing faster rehabilitation than even Japan. According to the World Bank it normally takes seven years for a country to rebuild an area struck by such a vast tragedy. But Gujarat government took only three to four years for reconstruction work to set a world record in this regard.

Let me give you my own example; I made a commitment to myself, as well as my organisation, to complete my assigned work of reconstructing 52 villages, including homes and other infrastructure, within one-and-a half years, and return to Gandhinagar. The reconstruction work included road connectivity, power, and water connections. Believe me, everything was accomplished within that committed time frame, including final accounts, payment settlements, documentation, and all the rest of paraphernalia. I had to recruit engineers, masons, and the entire team of workers required for such large-scale reconstruction. The 52 villages I reconstructed were 100 to 150 kilometers apart from each other. And yet, we could deliver as per schedule

because the government facilitated speedy work instead of slowing us down, as normally happens with the bureaucracy.

An important part of my intervention to create a good role model was the insistence that the electricity cables should be laid underground. I argued that if it could be done in Ahmedabad, why not in Kutch? That gave rise to a major controversy. People said that it was not possible to do this in such scattered, far-away villages. It would cost too much and so on. But I held my ground and said that when we were reconstructing the entire region, why not go for the best quality infrastructure? The chief minister fully backed my idea and, at his insistence, they laid underground power cables in two of the big villages on a trial basis. Once this was completed, the outcome was highly appreciated by everyone. The idea caught on, and underground cables gained acceptance for other villages as well. This has ensured stable 24x7 power supply to the remotest village.

It seems to me that doing such a fantastic job of rehabilitation and setting a world record in speed gave Modi sahib a lot of self-confidence, not only in himself but also in the potential and capacity of his bureaucracy to deliver.

Chobari & Trambo Today

Today, as one enters New Trambo, one sees large modern bungalows at the very entrance road leading to the village. Even though majority of the residents of Trambo belonged to scheduled castes and poor Muslims, who lived off wage labour and other low-paid rural occupations, the kind of houses that were built by the government, as part of rehabilitation package, today wear the look of middle-class homes. Since everyone got treated at par and got the same monetary and material support to build their homes, a new culture of egalitarianism took root. There was no difference between the housing quality of the rich and poor, Dalit or upper caste, Hindu or Muslim. Every neighbourhood got identical civil infrastructure—wide well-paved roads, 24x7 power, identical system of tapped water supply in every home. Each family—irrespective of caste, class, or religious affiliations—got the same kind of house and the same plot size. Each house consists of two rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom set with a small verandah and a large walled courtyard. As incomes increased in the following years, many improved and expanded these houses further. But the baseline is still egalitarian.

Before the earthquake, large tracts of land in Kutch were lying waste and people were migrating out in droves because the land was unable

to sustain even the sparse population of the region. But now land prices are sky-rocketing due to massive improvements in agriculture, owing to the availability of water, 24x7 power, and excellent road connectivity. In particular, I visited the house of the Harijan man to whom Modi had said, "Don't worry; I am like your son. We will take full care of you." His wife told me she couldn't speak a word to Modi because she couldn't stop crying since the family had lost four adults in the tragic quake.

Young Muslims of the village who were with Parvatiben when Modi had lunch in her tent, said that the government honoured every promise Modi ji made. The choice was left to each family whether they wanted all of it by way of cash or take building material from government depots. For instance, Yameen's family opted for cash instead of assistance in rebuilding the house. He was emphatic that there was not the slightest discrimination in the government's treatment of Muslims, Harijans, or others.

The entire row of these Harijan and Muslim houses carried an acknowledgment stating that it was built by Care India in collaboration with the Gujarat government and Trambo *gram samuday* (village community). Each family participated in the building of their own house by getting money in installments. For instance, the total amount sanctioned was Rs. 90,000; the family got Rs. 20,000 in the first installment. They could go and get the required construction material from government depots and as they proceeded with construction, they kept getting the balance installments. Not a single family complained about delayed payments or bureaucratic harassment in getting their dues.

Similarly, in Chobari, Ramji Mariya says, "It is only when Modi set up scores of depots for providing construction material, that the rehabilitation work caught speed. The engineers would come and check the building process at every stage and we were reimbursed money by the government accordingly. These 'material banks' were conveniently situated between groups of two-three villages so that villagers did not have to go far for procuring them. For building schools, etc., a contractor was hired by the village committee, which had total supervisory control. It was the good coordination between the government, the citizens, and the social work organisations that speeded up the entire rehabilitation programme."

Bharatbhai, who also lost everything in the earthquake, says, "In order to facilitate planned redevelopment of the village, several new housing

enclaves were created, as a result of which, we are not living in the old congested style village like before. We have proper wide streets and lanes. Today, the village has ten *vistaars* (sectors). That means it has grown manifold geographically. Modi has visited Chobari more than once after the November 14, 2001 visit. He even remembers the name of Purviben, who was our sarpanch earlier. He once mentioned in Vidhan Sabha how the *mava* (delicacy made from milk) of Chobari is the best in the region. On one occasion, he took milk cake from Chobari and distributed it among the MLAs in the Vidhan Sabha."

Ramji Mariya added, "In fact, after Modi's coming to power, several new welfare schemes have been created for Dalits. No one before him has given the kind of importance Modi gives to Baba Saheb Ambedkar. For instance, there is the *Ambedkar Aawas Yojna* (housing scheme in the name of Ambedkar) and several others for uplifting the status of Dalits. He has launched a scheme for building proper toilets in Dalit settlements. The Gujarat government has been extremely sensitive to Dalit issues—you won't find any evidence of discrimination against them in Gujarat."

He then took me to his own house, which had the most elegantly maintained exterior in the entire village. It was a little bungalow-style house loaded with beautiful plants and flowering trees making it look more like an elegant cottage in a European village than an Indian village home. The construction quality of Ramji's house, as well as the other houses I visited, was uniformly good because the government provided high-quality earthquake-resistant materials and designs. Ramji said their post-earthquake homes had withstood five to six Richter scale tremors. However, minor cracks had developed in Ramji's house from subsequent tremors, but they caused no damage to the house. Almost everyone I talked to said that one of the best things Modi did was to ensure that every single house and building constructed in the area was earthquake-resistant. This would never have happened if the government did not monitor the construction through specially trained technicians.

Dalits constitute 30 per cent of the total population of Chobari, but their houses were as good and as spacious as anyone else's. Since I kept pressing Ramji and others to recall likely instances of discrimination against Dalits and Muslims in the rehabilitation work, Ramji remonstrated me once again saying: "We are surprised why you keep raising this issue again and again. There were 100 other Dalit homes around my house. They have all migrated to the new planned enclave of houses created for

them after the earthquake. But I chose to stay right here. Around me are non-Dalit families. But I have never experienced the slightest touch of discrimination in their attitude towards me. Go and see for yourself the new enclave of Dalit homes. Our panchayat saw to it that they were the first ones to get wide RCC lanes, streetlights, water supply, drainage, etc. I will take you around that area myself."

Sure enough, when I visited the area, I saw neat and wide RCC lanes, large walled compounds with well-constructed rows of airy homes. Each compound had enough empty space to allow for expansion of the house as the family size grew. Chobari has acquired the characteristics of a planned little township, instead of the old-style congested village. With sharp rise in incomes, in the last eight-ten years, the living standards of these families had also risen dramatically. Given 24x7 power supply in these remote villages, every family I visited had refrigerators, TV sets, and other gadgets typical of urban middle class homes.

Belji Maria is another young Dalit of Chobari who lost his daughter and grandmother in the quake. He owns a little provision store in the village. The family owns some land but it is not the irrigable variety. He too expressed contentment with the rehabilitation measures. Arvind Meria, who is engaged in making cement blocks, confirmed what Ramji had said—that the Dalit enclave was the first one in the village to get electricity, new water supply system, and RCC roads.

The former sarpanch of Chobari, Nameribhai Jetha explained that he brought all these services to Dalit neighbourhoods as part of Modi government's *Angabhoot Yojana*, which mandates priority in providing civic amenities to Dalit settlements. Angabhoot also provides for a comprehensive approach to reaching several affirmative action measures and other benefits to Dalit communities.

I then visited some Muslim families who had moved out to the new enclave created during rehabilitation. One of the leading members of the Muslim community is Suleimanbhai. As with the Dalit enclave, the houses in the new Muslim enclave are also well-built, spacious, and surrounded by a large compound.

Suleimanbhai is a farmer and his family owns ten acres of land. The family had two houses. But both of them were destroyed during the earthquake, which also killed Suleimanbhai's father. He says they received compensation for both the houses with which they built their new houses. The government gave a grant of Rs 90,000 for each house. Everyone,

including Suleiman, said the money was enough to build quality homes with a bathroom, toilet, and kitchen because the government system of providing construction material proved very cost-efficient. Suleiman had high praise for the then village Sarpanch Nimeribhai who, he said, worked hard and with passion for the rehabilitation and new development of the village. "He promised us that we would get the best of facilities and he truly lived up to his promise. We got water, electricity, good roads, and all the rest," says Suleiman.

Most of the houses in the new Muslim enclave are away from the relatively congested inner areas of the old village. Every Muslim family today owns some or the other motor vehicle, in addition to TVs and refrigerators—things considered beyond reach a decade and a half ago for most rural households of this area.

Suleiman also spoke about the increase in agricultural output in the village thanks to better water management, building of 50-60 check dams around the area, and construction of a huge pond for irrigation purpose. Like many others, he too swore by the culture of mutual support and inter-community harmony in the village.

Samras Approach in Action

My visit to Chobari concluded with a late-night visit to the house of Nameribhai Jetha Ahir, who was the sarpanch of the village when the rehabilitation programme set into motion after Narendra Modi's visit, was being implemented. He described his own political journey and how this area turned from a traditional Congress stronghold to a BJP bastion:

> At the time of the earthquake, I was an ordinary BJP worker. I had never held any office nor fought any election till then. But I devoted myself with full energy to serve the people of my village after the earthquake. When election time came, my fellow villagers insisted on my filling in the nomination form for the post of sarpanch. I refused at first, but they prevailed upon me to contest elections. I was to be elected with samrasta (unanimous consensual choice). But, at the last minute, Congress people put up a candidate against me. So we had an election and I won with a lead of 1,000 votes in a total voter list of 3,000. My opponent secured only ten per cent of the votes. This used to be a totally Congress loyalist village and yet it elected a BJP worker with such overwhelming majority. After the election, I called a meeting and assured people that this village will lack nothing—be it roads, electricity, water, health

facilities, or other development works. For the next four years, I put all my energy into the comprehensive development of the village.

Later, I fought and won the district panchayat election. People had seen that due to my good work as a sarpanch, several ministers had come to this village to oversee its reconstruction and the district administration cooperated fully in meeting with our requirements. I won the district election also with a handsome lead. As a member of the district panchayat, I could ensure higher monetary grants for our village. That too helped in its speedy development.

When I fought for district panchayat, I resigned as the sarpanch of the village. But I ensured that a good person was chosen unopposed as my successor through the samras process. Twelve months later, when the regular elections came, I was by then the taluka president of BJP. At that time, I persuaded fellow villagers to elect unopposed an old Congressman as a samras sarpanch. We chose him because he is a good and honest human being and could carry everyone along rising above party considerations. I felt that if as a taluka president, I could not bring about samrasta in my own village, how would anyone trust me to work with samras spirit (building consensus, carrying everyone along) at the taluka level?

But in the third election, there were multiple candidates. So we could not have samras election. In the last few years, the amount of money coming in for development work in villages has increased manifold. These grants come to the account of the sarpanch. Therefore, there is now greater tussle over this post.

But, despite these electoral battles, in our village we maintain the spirit of samrasta. That is an old tradition of Kutch. We have very deep-rooted inter-community goodwill and tradition of mutually supportive relationships in our village. One example of it is the yearly *Padelsa Pir Mela*, which is jointly organised by all the communities. Every year, 50,000 to 100,000 people—both Hindus and Muslims gather for that mela in the month of March.

The How and Why of Economic Resurgence

A village elder, whose name I missed recording, provided the following overview of the new prosperity in the previously impoverished region:

> Earlier, all we had in Kutch was rain-fed agriculture in some pockets. Nature had not been kind to this region. But in the last ten years, even agriculture has transformed magically, as was done in the desert region of Israel. Nobody had ever thought that Kutch could develop agriculture simply by rain-water harvesting. Modi has hammered the message that not a single drop of rain-

water should be allowed to go waste. He gave farmers 60 per cent subsidy to incentivise them to build check-dams and *talawadis* on their land so that every drop of water that comes in the form of rain is retained and not allowed to flow out. He also undertook the repair and renovation of all the old dams that had become dysfunctional due to administrative neglect over the years.

It was assumed that since nature had been harsh on Kutch, we had to either live with it or migrate in search of better life opportunities. But it is not so any more. Kutch has large tracts of greenery and a rapidly growing agriculture and dairy farming. This was made possible because Modi ji began organising *Van Mahotsav* (Festival of Forests), Cattle Festival, and Water Festival. Nobody had ever thought of these things before. During Van Mahotsavs in different districts, tree planting is launched as a social movement, including planting trees on both sides of the road.

There has been massive investment in developing horticulture. Farmers get assured electricity; they are given quality fertilizers at subsidized rates. Who could have imagined green houses, white net houses being set up by ordinary farmers in Kutch to undertake new experiments in agriculture? Government officers and agricultural scientists proactively reach out to farmers, not only at the time of the annual *Krishi Mela* (Agricultural Fairs) but also on a regular basis.

The cattle breeders of this area had started giving up their centuries-old occupation because of the absence of infrastructure for marketing and other facilities. But in recent years, there has been a massive boost to milk production because farmers are getting help in improving their breed of cattle. Affordable veterinary services have been provided by the government along with efficient channels of marketing of milk. That is how people's interest in this traditional occupation has revived and has resulted in a substantial improvement in their income levels. What is remarkable about the Kutch development story is that the growth in agriculture and animal husbandry is almost at par with the industrial growth.

According to Nimeribhai, in the last ten years, his area has witnessed nearly 80 per cent increase in agricultural production. This did not seem an empty boast given the visible improvements in the standard of living in the village, the number of new motor vehicles, and tractors one saw in Chobari. Nimeribhai attributed the increasing agriculture prosperity to the following factors:

One major factor for the massive improvements in the farm output is due to the sustained efforts of the government through *Krishi Utsavs* (Agricultural Fests). In the summer months, before the harvest, officials connected with issues related to farming, along with agricultural scientists, travel extensively from one village to another organising agricultural fairs. Their purpose is to provide the best quality certified seeds, safe fertilizers, pesticides, and information about latest technologies and techniques in scientific and efficient farming—from tissue culture to setting up green houses, drip irrigation, and organic farming. Modi ji himself addresses several such Krishi Utsavs every year where farmers also get to share best practices. Those who have undertaken successful innovations are given awards. Even during normal times, agricultural scientists, and extension workers are just a phone call away.

Krishi Utsavs popularised the idea of regular soil testing and made it easy for farmers to get it done. After soil testing, the agricultural scientists not only advise farmers on what nutrients their soil needs, but also the amounts to be fed to the soil. They teach the farmers latest techniques of pest control and the appropriate quantities of fertilizers needed for the soil. Secondly, the rapid spread of drip irrigation, with massive government subsidies and inputs, has also proved to be a boon for our arid region.

Today, numerous families in the village have their own tractors. These hundreds of tractors have been purchased in the last six-seven years. This is because the farm output has increased manifold and labour become scarce. Depending on the horsepower of the tractor, each farmer gets a subsidy of Rs. 45,000-60,000. The village has nearly 2,500 households and more than 400 tractors. But not every one of the 2,500 families own land. So the ratio of landowners to tractor owners is much higher. Now the government has come up with a new scheme to provide 50 per cent subsidy on the ten additional agricultural implements, such as tractor trolley, harrow, cultivator, etc. Altogether, they cost Rs. 15 lakhs. This subsidy is spread over four years so that farmers can buy them with ease.

The government has also invested heavily into water harvesting structures. All this has created a new interest in farming. My own son, who has finished class 12, insists on taking up farming and convert it into a hi-tech enterprise.

Nameribhai's teenage son Dharmendra confirmed this and said, unlike the earlier generation of Kutchis who felt the need to migrate in order to make their fortunes, now far fewer young people want to leave their villages. "I will study further through a correspondence course, but my

real interest is in hi-tech agriculture," he said. Dharmendra has already visited the Agricultural University at Anand to familiarise himself with the ongoing research there. Given the massive effort put in by the government to build intimate links between the farmers and farm scientists, such visits are encouraged by agricultural universities. The district panchayats are also actively sponsoring such trips.

A number of farmers from this region have visited Israel with government support for training in drip farming and other latest techniques for arid regions. Nameribhai said that, in recent years, their region has started growing high value crops like *jeera* (cumin seeds). They have also started growing cotton, which was impossible earlier. *Arandi* was grown here even earlier, but there has been tremendous increase in its output. Farmers have also begun experimenting with high value fruits like dates and pomegranates because soil tests by the agricultural university scientiests showed that their land is suitable for these two fruits. The government had first imported date saplings from Israel and also developed improved varieties in Gujarat's own agricultural universities. Nameribhai says:

> Another important initiative of Narendrabhai is that he has revived and provided new vigour to the dairy industry of Kutch, which had started declining. I took the cue from him and decided our village and taluka should also develop our milk production. So I began a small milk *mandali* with about a dozen cattle owners and slowly created several more. We then got an engineering graduate, Vallabhjibhai, to create an all-Kutch cooperative of milk producers. When the chief minister got to hear about our cooperative, he took a great deal of personal interest in it because increasing cattle wealth and milk production is a cause very dear to his heart. He ensured that our cooperative got registered within ten days.
>
> However, when we began our first co-operative *mandali* with 11 members, we did not have much money to create the requisite infrastructure. We began by collecting the milk of three villages of this area and supplying it to Dangdra. Slowly, we got a refrigeration system at Rapar and gradually spread it to each village. It all started with supplying a mere 30 litres of milk and today we have reached 2 lakh litres a day. In the hot summer months, the milk supply reduces to half, but in cooler months, it is 2,00,000 litres per day. This in itself is bringing in crores of rupees worth additional income in our villages. When we began our cooperative, the milk was selling at Rs. 15 a litre. Now it ranges from Rs. 40-50 depending on the fat content.

> Even in Krishi Melas they guide farmers on how to keep cattle healthy and improve milk output. Veterinary doctors are only a phone call away. The vet of our area covers ten villages. He charges a nominal fee for home visits to cover his commute expenses. But if a farmer takes the animal to the vet then his services are free. The vet department has also been trained to do cataract operations and other complex surgeries with hi-tech equipment. We are going to get an ambulance service for animals fairly soon. It already exists in many areas. The routine medicines and vaccines for animals are free. But for serious ailments requiring special medicines, the cattle owner has to pay the cost of medicines.

Nameribhai's wife is the chairperson of the Irrigation Board and has, therefore, become active in public life. She was earlier a member of the district panchayat as well. They both work together as a team. Unfortunately, I did not get enough time to talk to Nimeribhai's wife independently.

Those who have been led to believe that Modi has made BJP an aggressive instrument of divisive politics, of discrimination against Muslims, and pitched Hindus against Muslims in Gujarat, will be pleasantly surprised to find numerous Nameribhais in the towns and villages of Gujarat who are practicing the politics of samrasta—not just between Hindus and Muslims but also with their main political rivals in the Congress Party. Not surprisingly, numerous Congressmen have started gravitating towards BJP.

Modi has been able to change the face of governance in Gujarat because he has been able to motivate a sufficient number of his party men to facilitate the agenda of making governance citizen-friendly—of providing various government services at the doorstep of people rather than people coming as supplicants to government offices. He has tried to convert every government programme into a mass movement by energising his party cadres to act as effective bridges of communication between the government and citizens, down to the remotest villages of Gujarat. These were his starting points when he took over as CM in October 2001. None of this indicates that Narendra Modi was itching to engineer riots to consolidate a Hindu vote bank.

CHAPTER 7

How Bhuj Rose Out of Its Own Ashes

A Survivor's Account

I am telling the people of Kutch, don't sell even one inch of your land; your Kutch is going to become such a Nandanvan that you will forever regret that you sold away your ancestral land. So please avoid the temptation of selling, since this land is going to become extremely valuable.
Narendra Modi to people of Kutch in 2002

The historic town of Bhuj was also reduced to rubble on January 26, 2001, when an earthquake of unprecedented fury shook Gujarat. Earlier quakes, such as the ones in Latur or Chamoli district, had only hit rural areas. But, in this case all the towns of Kutch—Bhuj, Anjar, and Bachau—were also razed to the ground.

Of the many accounts of how these towns came to life again, the account of Rajesh Bhatt, now president of the Kutch Business Chamber, is an illustrative narrative that goes beyond his personal tragedy and recovery to encompass the phoenix-like rise of Bhuj from its own ashes. Like numerous others, his family of 12 was also devastated. I reproduce below an account based on his video-recorded interview on August 16, 2013:

> I was a manager in Dena Bank up to 1995 and started my own business of trading in construction machinery and power generators. But, with 24x7 power supply in Gujarat, the power generator business has altogether collapsed. In 2001, when the earthquake hit, two floors of my 13-bedroom three-storey bungalow simply collapsed and the house was flattened. The third floor tilted at an angle of 45°. As luck would have it, I was in my bedroom on the third floor. It was nearly 40 ft above ground level. But, when the two floors below crashed, the third floor was left hanging just 3 feet above ground. That is when I jumped out on to the street. The building next to my house had 10 floors. It too collapsed like a pack of cards killing over 170 persons.

My wife died in that tragedy. When the tremors came, she was doing puja on the ground floor. I was at home because it was a national holiday. In the middle floor, my father, younger brother, and niece were watching the Republic Day parade of Delhi on TV. The earthquake had the power of 100 trains travelling at 100 kms per hour crashing together. My first reaction was that Pakistan has fired some missiles at Bhuj because, until two days earlier, we were getting news of hostilities at the border. But, when I jumped out and looked around, I saw havoc beyond belief.

The blunt truth is that Keshubhai did not handle that emergency with the care and commitment it demanded. Therefore, citizens were really in rage against the government. The month of January is very cold in Kutch and even well-off people had lost everything. But our greater grief was that of losing our dear ones. There were families where nine out of 10 people had perished. Such people were deeply traumatised and couldn't even make sense of what was happening around them.

The government offered a compensation of Rs. 100,000 per dead person. But, for the survivors, money meant nothing. They had lost the will to live. Speaking for myself, our family lived under the open sky for at least two months in that bitter cold. I was still in the same clothes in which I had slept on January 25. We were all lying in the open when we were told a vehicle was distributing bread. My daughter and I had to run after that vehicle to catch a loaf or two of bread, which they were throwing at people. They didn't even know how to arrange for orderly distribution amidst that chaos.

That night, my 91-year-old guru ji phoned me and said that this was an act of God, and asked me not to lose hope saying I was not the only one in this plight. He also assured me that we would overcome this tragedy very soon, and that Kutch would progress a 1000 times over in the years to come. But he gave me strict advice that I should not take monetary help from any one even if I have to take food from charity.

I told him I would adhere to his advice but I thought that he was giving me these assurances about the future just to offer me comfort. When my brother-in-law, who is a doctor in Ahmedabad, had come to help me, I requested him to leave behind his stethoscope. I used to wear the stethoscope and go around camps pretending to be a doctor. Before the disaster struck us, we had three cars and a two-wheeler, all of which were also crushed. One of my friends came one day and took us to his colony. Their house had also collapsed. But there was some clear open space near their house. Our whole family stayed in that open ground with temperatures falling down to zero degrees at night.

We had neither warm clothes to wear nor food to eat. I wore my stethoscope and went to the cremation ground to beg for some wood. Pretending to be a doctor, I lied to them that several dead bodies were lying in the open in our area and I needed the firewood to cremate them right there since I had no means to transport those bodies to the cremation ground. That's how I managed to get some wood from them. With that wood, we lit fires to keep ourselves warm in those freezing nights. Both my father and brother had fractured both their legs. There were no hospitals to treat them and I had no other option but to tie straight pieces of wood around their legs to protect the fractured bones.

Every morning, I had to carry both of them to help answer the call of nature. For days on end, I would attend to them early morning and, by 6 a.m., go back to our own neighbourhood to search for my wife. I would go and beg all the humanitarian organisations that had come to Bhuj to help me search for my wife or find her dead body. But, they too were helpless because everything was buried under boulders and tons of debris.

At that time, three organisations did salutary work—the Indian Army, the RSS, and the international rescue team. The foreign teams came with the latest equipment. They had snake eye, sniffer dogs, RCC cutters, generators, and a whole range of devices to lift the rubble and rescue buried people. Our government had nothing of the sort at that time. For ten days, I kept hovering around that place begging everyone to help me rescue my wife or recover her body. My guru ji had told me that she was buried right under my collapsed house. People kept telling me she may have been taken to some other city hospital along with the other injured people, but since my guru ji had said that I would find her right here, I refused to believe anyone.

When all else failed, my brother-in-law and I thought we would become our own sniffer dogs. As we moved around sniffing, we found a foul smell emanating from a particular spot. But, it was coming from 25-30 feet below. As luck would have it, a naval team from the ship-breaking yard was passing by that place at that time. I still remember that an officer named Dwivedi, who saw desperation and depression writ large on my face, asked me whether one of my relatives was buried under the debris. When I told him I was trying to recover the dead body of my wife, he said had she been alive, his team would have tried its best to dig her out. I said, call it my attachment but I want to see her face even if she is no more. He said, "If we tell our workers she is dead, they will use machines and her body will come out totally crushed. But, if you tell them that you heard your wife's voice two hours ago, they will work with

frantic zeal to bring her out intact." I said, I am willing to lie, and begged him to help me recover her body, no matter what it takes.

So, those people dug with full energy and care for the next five-six hours. By the time they reached 20-22 ft, I saw her foot and nearly collapsed. That was the worst moment of my life. When her body was taken out, my brother-in-law insisted I don't see her face, since it was badly mutilated. I could not even provide a decent cremation for a woman who had given me so much support during our married life. We had to place her body on a dirty mattress, which was lying around in the rubble. As we scrounged around for some string to tie her body to that mattress, we found some broken telephone and electric wires. Using those to tie her up, it took us three hours to reach the cremation ground.

I knew one Rajeshbhai who worked in the cremation ground. He told me "Your wife's death is an act of God. This is no time or place for sentiments. It is not possible to carry out the full rituals at this time. Please take her body to the first floor and throw it down into the mass cremations going on." We had no choice but to go there and throw my wife's body into the burning fires below where nearly 300 bodies were being cremated together. I still can't get over the grief of having failed to do her *antim sanskars* (last rites) according to Hindu rituals.

The bitter truth is that the government of the day offered us no help whatsoever. It failed on every front. For one full year, we lived like beggars and ate whatever was offered to us by charitable organisations. The government did not run even one relief camp for that one year, nor provided rations to any family. All this work was done by religious organisations and international NGOs. Sikh gurudwaras, Swaminarayan Sect, Murari Bapu, RSS, and other NGOs kept us alive. Our Swaminarayan guru ji ran a daily *langar* for 5,000 people. A similar number of people was fed by Dhyani Swami ji right behind the collector's office. Even government officials and ministers had to eat there. Most of the able survivors, including my family, also joined the *sewa* work of these religious organisations. In any case, there was nothing else to do. Joining *sewa* provided some relief from our collective grief. For one full year, we all ate from those *langars*. Later on, our guru ji provided us temporary shelter till we rebuilt our house.

But the scale at which reconstruction and rehabilitation was required could not be done by charitable organisations alone. As far as Keshubhai's government was concerned, it could not get its act together to do an honest job of even removing the hundreds of millions of tons of rubble lying all around. The process was excruciatingly slow and inefficient. What is worse is

that, even at the time of such suffering, they indulged in scams in removing rubble. Officers and politicians ganged up with contractors and indulged in malpractices in rubble removal. For instance, if the debris of my house produced ten truckloads, these contractors inflated the figures ten times over to make a killing. The booty was obviously shared with the netas and babus.

They also played foul in the compensation money meant to be given to families of the dead. The officials made bogus claim papers in the name of people who were living outside Gujarat and pocketed that money. Officials were presenting highly inflated bills for everything. It was very painful to witness all that. We were mute witnesses to these rackets and brazen loot of public money under the guise of relief works. We felt totally helpless and demoralised because at that time we didn't have any political leader who would have listened to our complaints.

I think it was yet another act of god that at such a grim time, he sent Narendra Modi as his ambassador (*doot*). I have no links with any political party nor am I against any party. But I am being honest when I say that Narendra Modi came as a saviour for us. Before he became CM, we knew just a little bit about him - that he is a man of ethics, he is pious and non-corrupt. He more than lived up to his earlier reputation. In his first public announcement after taking charge as CM, he said that his immediate priority was speedy rehabilitation of earthquake victims. He put the government machinery on the right track within days of taking over. Within three months of his taking charge, Bhuj was cleared of all the debris in a very professional and systematic manner.

He streamlined the functioning of Gujarat Disaster Management Authority (GDMA) and brought his best officers to take charge of rebuilding Bhuj and rehabilitation of victims. We saw how the same organisation acquired a new persona. The same tasks which GDMA performed in 6-7 months, began to be done, within ten days after Modi took charge. That's the kind of speed and energy the new CM brought to the process of reconstruction of Kutch and building houses for those rendered homeless. Most importantly, he lived up to his promise of turning disaster into an opportunity. The Gujarat Urban Development Authority (GUDA) was refashioned to provide high-quality civic infrastructure to all the devastated towns. For example, the area I used to live in had a maximum road width of three metres. Today, there is no road in Bhuj that is less than 18 metres wide.

We were all left wondering where such a big task force had come from. It was the same government machinery, the same officials, and the same contractors, yet their working had been transformed as though with a magic wand.

The work gained momentum, the quality of rehabilitation work improved dramatically, and people felt a surge of hope.

It was only after Modi took over that a policy declaration was made that everyone whose home was destroyed would be relocated and given a free 120 sq. yards plot complete with all civic infrastructure—electricity, drainage, water connection, etc.

Everyone got a 120 sq. yards plot free—whether they owned a modest hut or a big bungalow worth Rs. 2 crores. This too eliminated the scope of corruption. If people had been given plots of differential sizes, those with political clout would have managed bigger plots. In addition, the government gave a cash grant of Rs. 150,000 for each family to construct their own house. Construction material could be procured at far below market prices from the 'material banks' set up by the government. At that time, the money proved more than sufficient for rebuilding our homes because we could get good quality construction material at very low prices from these government depots.

Best of all, there was no gap between announcements of schemes and the commencement of the delivery process. Officials were empowered to take on-the-spot decisions to speed up implementation of all that was promised.

Allocation of plots took place with lightning speed. Large teams of officials were brought in to assess the damage to each building. They had been instructed to trust people and do away with the usual obstructionist approach, or red-tapism. For instance, the officials who came to our area asked me to provide them proof of ownership of my house plot by way of a ration card, passport, electricity bill or any other document. I told them I was left with nothing—there was no paper proof since we could not take out anything and had escaped in the clothes we were wearing. They took our statements at face value and said that all that we had to do was to go to the local municipal council and get a certificate that we were residents of that area. That certificate also came easily. This approach of trusting citizens, rather than treating them as potential thugs, acted as a soothing balm on our wounds.

Putting Systems in Place & Rejuvenating Economy

Anil Das, who was part of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) team that joined hands with the Gujarat government in rehabilitation work in 2001, says:

> Even while Modi speeded up and streamlined the removal of rubble, giving people proper temporary shelters so they could escape the freezing winters of

Kutch, and fast-tracked infrastructure development, one of his most dramatic and controversial moves was to freeze and put on hold all housing and reconstruction of public buildings because there was massive corruption and mismanagement in the way money was being garnered from various sources and siphoned off by vested interests within and outside the government. Even I initially opposed this move of blocking all housing construction. But, once he explained it, I was convinced he did the right thing.

His approach was to mobilise all possible resources and institutions, including corporate houses, religious organisations, and NGOs—both national and international—to undertake this mammoth task. He said that there was no way a single agency, no matter how large, including the government, could undertake swift reconstruction on such a scale on its own strength. Therefore, it was necessary to bring as many organisations as possible to work with synergy.

To resume Rajesh Bhatt's story of how the rejuvenation of Kutch led to a dramatic reversal in his own fortunes:

Since the reconstruction was to be undertaken on such a gigantic scale, there was acute shortage of skilled labour in Kutch. Apart from training of skilled labour undertaken on a massive scale, the Modi government announced right at the start that anyone wanting to go to Bhuj, or anywhere in Kutch, from any part of Gujarat could travel free of cost in all state transport buses. That was a remarkable initiative because at that time nobody was inclined to come and work in Kutch since the area, considered backward even during normal times, was badly devastated.

With this and other incentives, labour started coming into this area. Local people also got employment, with the government investing heavily into developing new infrastructure, world-class roads, electrification, water supply, sanitation, and mass housing projects.

I too got a chance to start my business afresh. As luck would have it, in 1998 when a big cyclone had hit this area, I had gone out of my way to help a total stranger whose generator, which he had purchased through me, had been washed away in the cyclone. He met me per chance and saw an earthquake resistance pre-fabricated model house I had designed and constructed for a housing project being undertaken by our guru ji.

Next day, this man came to my place and said, "Can you make another 100 houses like the model house you showed me?" He said that the work was worth Rs. 1 crore and he was ready to give us the work because he believed in my

integrity. I told him I didn't have the capital required to invest in the business. So, the very next day he transferred Rs. 25 lakhs into my bank account—this at a time when my office had also been totally devastated. He said, "You had helped me when I was in crisis. Now it's my turn to help you stand on your feet once again."

Rajesh Bhatt then pioneered the manufacture of environment-friendly fly ash bricks and has become a world leader in that industry. Bhatt brought his fly ash experiment to the notice of the then President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, who acknowledged it publicly.

The first order of 50 lakh fly ash bricks came from the Gujarat Urban Development Board. His eco-friendly bricks were found to be a better substitute for lining manholes as compared to the red bricks, which were an environmental hazard. To start manufacturing, he and his two engineer brothers got a bank loan of about Rs. 10 lakhs. This, too, was made possible because the Gujarat government had begun to encourage setting up of industries in Kutch, as part of giving new direction and energy to the shattered economy there. Very soon, they developed their own hi-tech automatic fly-ash manufacturing plant. Today, he is considered a leading expert on low-cost housing and has been sent by the Gujarat government to Italy, US, UK, and several African and Asian countries to demonstrate his expertise. He says:

Prior to the earthquake, there was no scope for trade and industry in Kutch. I, too, was selling power generators, not manufacturing anything. But, because Modi laid out the red carpet for those wanting to set up industry in Kutch by declaring a tax holiday and providing quality infrastructure, both big and small industries have mushroomed and are flourishing here. Since there was an NDA government at the Centre at that time, we were also exempted from excise and other central taxes. The state government also wrote off VAT and other local taxes. The rapid growth of industry in this arid region has generated massive employment.

Within one year of taking charge as CM, Modi gave a speech in Kutch saying, "I am telling the people of Kutch, don't sell even one inch of your land; your Kutch is going to become such a *Nandanvan* that you will forever regret that you sold away your ancestral land. So please avoid the temptation of selling since this land is going to become extremely valuable."

Rule Based, Pro-People Policies

This approach is at complete variance with how other state governments have acted with regard to land transfer from agriculture to industry. In almost every other state of India, politicians and bureaucrats keep decisions about new industrial or infrastructure projects secret from the public till they have purchased land from farmers of that region at dirt-cheap prices. They then manage to make windfall profits because as an industrial park or corporate businesses are set up there, the land prices skyrocket. But Modi has insisted on corporates dealing directly with farmers instead of the government acquiring land for them at artificially depressed prices, thus robbing farmers of market prices. Land use transfers are also not as tainted with scams in Gujarat as in other states because of transparent, rule-based decisions. Earlier, there were no buyers of land in Kutch even at dirt-cheap prices. But today land prices have shot high because Modi's planning was far-sighted.

As a result, once poor marginal farmers hit a jackpot and each is sitting on a goldmine. This is not to say corruption in land deals vanished. Despite, a clean policy at the top, politicians and bureaucrats did manipulate decisions for personal aggrandisement. But when caught, they did not get protection from the top. Despite a transparent system put in place, some officers misused the powers given to them for on-the-spot speedy decisions. One such IAS Officer, Pradeep Sharma, sucked in others into a major scam—some were willing partners while others got pulled in inadvertently. However, the system caught up with Sharma when criminal cases were filed against him by citizens of Kutch. Unfortunately, some of the honest officers also got trapped in the process because, as their senior, Sharma had made them sign cooked-up accounts.[1]

Futuristic Planning Kutch Becomes Leader in Solar & Wind Power

To continue with Bhatt's story of how Modi's farsighted policies transformed the once backward hinterland bordering Pakistan:

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1 For details of Pradeep Sharma's case, see: Madhu P. Kishwar, "*Ulta Chor Kotwal Ko Daante*: Indicted IAS Officer, Pradeep Sharma's Counter Offensive against Narendra Modi," December 3, 2013, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1738#.Uv3tQUKSxJP.

I have been a three-time president of the Kutch Chamber of Commerce. But, in the very first meeting Modi addressed our Chamber, he told us that Kutch was going to become the global hub of industry, ports, wind energy, solar energy, and a world leader in producing electricity. He said to me, "Rajesh, I don't mind whether you follow my advice or criticise me. But I mean what I say. It is my dream to have Gujarat produce 10,000 megawatts of electricity. Given the huge coastal belt of Kutch, I am going to generate 10,000 megawatts of power in Kutch alone by importing coal from the cheapest sources."

Everyone, including leading businessmen and corporate honchos, laughed at hearing this. Congressmen declared him a lunatic. The very next day, all the newspapers published front-page news saying that Modi had gone mad; that he didn't even know the difference between megawatts and kilowatts. Today, he has proven them all wrong. Kutch is now supplying its surplus power to several neighbouring states. Both the Tatas and the Adanis have 4000-megawatts power projects each. The Tata Power project is still under execution, but the Adani Power Project has been operational for some years now, supplying power all over Gujarat.

Kutch is also producing enormous quantities of wind power. This region always had high wind velocity but nobody before Modi thought of harnessing it. Even we Kutchis never dreamt this was an asset we could use to our benefit. Also, this region has enormous tracts of wasteland because the soil is not fit for agriculture. All that wasteland has been put to good use by the state government by encouraging investors to set up wind energy plants. Today, they dot the entire coastal region. Coal-based power plants are not only eco-hostile but the supply of coal is going to run out one day, while wind energy is inexhaustible.

Secondly, Kutch has 300 days of sunshine a year. None of us ever paid attention to how much potential this created for power generation. But Modi made Kutch and Gujarat a leader in harnessing solar power. This is what he meant when he said we are going to convert the earthquake into an opportunity.

Modi could do far-sighted planning while undertaking the task of rebuilding Kutch from rubble because he thinks big and has a long-term vision that is not inhibited by short-term electoral considerations. Even our power cables are now being laid underground. Our streetlights are all being run on solar power. There is no open sewage. Even old villages of Gujarat are being encouraged to go for underground sewage system as a measure of promoting hygienic living.

The Magic of Narmada Waters: For decades, various governments kept assuring us that the waters of Narmada River would be brought to Kutch.

But nothing happened. Kutchis were perpetually water starved. But Modi came and gave an ultimatum to his officials saying he wanted to ensure that clean drinking water reaches the farthest end of Kutch within a year. And it happened. Today, we get zero TDS drinking water from Narmada. TDS is a unit for measuring hardness of water. In pre-Modi days, we were drinking 1700 TDS. Now our water comes through very high quality giant pipes which don't corrode. In addition, the government has installed water filter plants in every village through the Narmada Drinking Water Supply Corporation (NDWSC). The people of Kutch could not even dream of something like this 15 years ago.

Now the government has started constructing canals to provide Narmada water for irrigation also. It would have happened already but for the tussle with the Central government, which is holding back permission to raise the height of Narmada Dam. Once that happens, there will be enough pressure for Narmada water to reach us through irrigation canals.

Economic Boost from Private Ports: Another factor that gave the Kutchi economy a major boost is the coming of private ports. Earlier, there was only one *sarkari* port in this region—the Kandla port—which, like all government facilities of those days, was inefficient and shoddy in its functioning. But the Mundra and Adani ports have brought about a sea change in the methods of handling cargo ships. The incoming vessels are loaded and unloaded within a day. Earlier, at Kandla, they had to wait forever before they were loaded and unloaded, thus raising the cost of operations for cargo companies. Today, Adani port has the distinction of being the biggest and among the most modern private ports in Asia.

These ports have world-class facilities and work very professionally. So most of the business has now shifted to these private ports that have created lakhs of new jobs and business opportunities—both directly and indirectly. The urban planning model adopted by Modi for Kutch was not the product of a rushed, knee-jerk response to a disaster. It planned for future generations as well.

Preserving Valuable Haritage: Let me also tell you how creative Modi is in dealing with heritage issues. Right in the heart of Bhuj, we have an old fort. Ever since Independence, it had been occupied by the army. Our CM had long negotiations with the army and was able to persuade them to vacate the fort. They were given alternative space for the facilities they had to shift out. The government spent Rs. 150 crores to make a *Smriti Van* - a memorial park - to commemorate those who died in the earthquake. This Smriti Van is spread over 60-70 acres of land. The army vacated the fort just a year ago but the work of developing this memorial is already moving fast. The State government had

sent the Bhuj Collector to China and Europe to study such memorials along with a team of disaster management specialists so that they not only picked up the best creative ideas but also took care that the memorial was earthquake-resistant. One of our local architects, Balkrishna Joshi, who gave the theme of this memorial, was also part of this study team.

Making Neglected Kutch, Tourism-Worthy: However, bringing Amitabh Bachchan as brand ambassador of Kutch was Modi's masterstroke. He knows how to make the best use of the talents of each person. Bachchan is an iconic figure who is loved and respected by people of all age groups from a five-year-old child to a 75-year-old man. Bringing such a great personality to promote Kutch is in itself a big achievement. To top it, Bachchan sahib said, "Narendra Modi ji is such a good man that whatever I do to promote Gujarat, will be free of charge." You won't believe it, the ad campaign with the slogan: *Kutch nahin dekha to kuchh nahin dekha* (If you haven't seen Kutch, you haven't seen anything), has worked wonders to promote tourism in this area. But Modi ji was wise enough to first create the required infrastructure and invest in fixing the hitherto neglected heritage before launching the ad campaign. That is why it has created sustained tourist inflow and made Kutch into a major sightseeing destination, though till a decade ago, nobody even thought of it as a possible tourist hub.

Take the example of *Rann Utsav*. When Modi ji first started it, our business chamber used to beg people to come for it because no one came since it was believed to be a godforsaken backward region. Now the Rann Utsav runs for 90 days and online global booking for tents starts three months in advance. There is such a rush for bookings that numerous people have to be turned down.

That is precisely his special genius. He knows how to bring out the best out of every situation no matter how adverse.

Multi-Hazard Resistant Construction

The owner-driven reconstruction of houses was probably the most innovative aspect of the Gujarat reconstruction programme. The Modi government ensured that the reconstruction process included people's participation, with the real stakeholders becoming lead players in this process.

But, for that participation to become meaningful and creative, people also needed to be educated on how to build quality houses that are earthquake resistant. So, the government went full blast on an Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaign in order

to train the people of Kutch in the basics of earthquake-resistant quality construction. Anil Das says:

> The mass contact campaign was so intense and thorough that even village children were introduced to the required information. In those years, every street corner, every bus, every public building and space had large hoardings providing citizen-friendly capsules of information along with vivid pictures and diagrams. We made videos of the 'shake-table test' for assessing the earthquake resistance of any building. Scores of Tata Sumos fitted with video projectors went around each and every village of earthquake-affected areas several times over in a year during that period when people needed to be made aware of what kind of construction would make them safe in future. The outreach campaign was so rigorous that you could not have missed it even if you were sleepwalking.

Guidelines prepared by the Seismic Adviser to the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) were widely circulated in the earthquake-affected areas. Many innovative construction technologies were adopted while fully utilising local resources and local technology. Well-crafted booklets in Gujarati were prepared in lakhs and distributed in every town and village with the aim of reaching every family so that they had this information at their fingertips.

School and college curricula were also modified to include this information as a mandatory part of education at all levels. This way, three generations were trained simultaneously by the mass education campaign.

The Gujarat government also involved IIT professors in this work. Construction at that scale needed thousands of trained technicians to monitor the quality of construction and test its earthquake-cum-cyclone resistance. India till then did not produce many such technicians. The Gujarat government engaged IIT professors to train ITI (Industrial Training Institute) students and those doing engineering diplomas to learn the required skills. For ITI students, IIT professors are like demi-gods. So they too were enthused to get such advance level training. Within no time, Gujarat had an army of trained technicians—with each ITI student supervising 5-6 houses each. The government paid for this supervision but the cost involved was very small when compared to the immediate gains by way of improvements in construction quality.

And in the same stroke, a very large pool of trained manpower was also created. Today, all those technicians are well employed in the construction industry—not just in Gujarat, but all over India.

Anil Das says, "Modi has constantly built on that base and improved it further by creating special institutions for the study and practice of disaster management. For instance, there was a huge demand for masons because of the widespread damage and destruction. They came from neighbouring regions and states. But most of the masons were not familiar with hazard-resistant construction and retrofitting. Therefore, training of masons was undertaken on a war-footing. More than 29,000 masons who participated in the training were provided with the cost of travel and food and given a free tool kit at the end. District Rural Development Agencies, the Directorate of Employment and Training, the NCCBM (National Council for Cement and Building Materials), and various NGOs were involved in this process."

Similarly, for government engineers, six-week training courses on seismic retrofitting, seismic design of concrete and masonry structures, and seismic design of bridges were organised. These courses, run at Rajkot, Gandhinagar, and Bhuj, were provided by IIT Powai and IIT Kanpur. In addition, a special course on earthquake engineering was organised for architects.

This is how skill development through rigorous training and capacity building has come to acquire very deep roots and has changed the face of education in Gujarat. Modi has deep passion for improving the quality of education at all levels and for imparting new cutting-edge skills to the younger generation in order to make our young people be counted among the best in the world.

New Approaches to Urban Reconstruction

Normally, the job of town planning is done by government agencies. But most of our municipal corporations that manage the affairs of our towns and cities are sorely lacking in expertise on planning or even managing the civic and infrastructure requirements of urban centres. Had the job of reconstructing these towns been left to government planners, it would have taken far longer and would have resulted in a shabbier job. However, by relaxing bureaucratic rules, Modi allowed a range of private consultants, architects, and urban planners to speedily rebuild the shattered towns of Kutch. Their mandate was to build in a manner

that would change the face of these old, decaying towns and give them the best of modern infrastructure.

Among the star performers in the earthquake rehabilitation work is an unassuming and now retired IAS officer, P.K. Mishra, who was principal secretary to the chief minister when Modi became CM. He was appointed the CEO of the GSDMA. Through his stellar work in the reconstruction of Kutch, he has today become one of the leading global experts in disaster management.

The approach of the government of Gujarat and the GSDMA to urban reconstruction, particularly those of the four towns of Kutch, was not only systematic but also set new standards in citizen-friendly, scientific planning.

Electricity connections and provision for piped water were inbuilt into the house design even before every village got 24x7 power connection and water pipes. P.K. Mishra's book *The Kutch Earthquake 2001, Recollections, Lessons and Insights*[2] describes the process through which new towns rose out of the rubble of old ones.

To begin with, the School of Architecture, Ahmedabad undertook a study on the nature of the damage and approach to reconstruction in urban areas, particularly the inner city of Bhuj. Faculty members and students of the postgraduate programme in urban planning participated in the study. They conducted field visits, interacted with the affected persons, and undertook sample surveys in order to ascertain the views of the public. Based on discussions with the people, they created a roadmap, which included:

- Improving layout of settlements and urban infrastructure.
- Setting up of a local authority at Bhuj to offer technical assistance for appropriate construction and monitoring of reconstruction.
- Adoption of a town planning scheme for re-development of the inner city.
- Widening of roads to facilitate movement of vehicles at the time of crisis and development of a hierarchy of streets.
- Reorganisation of old housing plots where necessary in order to widen the roads; acquisition of plots that are cut more than 75 per cent.

2 Pramod K. Mishra, *The Kutch Earthquake 2001: Recollections, Lessons and Insights*, (New Delhi: National Institute of Disaster Management, 2004), pp. 148-60.

The outcome of this study provided valuable inputs for planning reconstruction of the four towns of Kutch district. It also enabled policy makers to crystallise their ideas and to formulate an approach envisaging a mix of *in-situ* reconstruction and relocation of these four towns.

Area Development Authorities (ADA) for the four towns were set up under the provisions of the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act.

Trusting Citizens & Making them Real Stakeholders

Public consultation with local communities, eminent citizens, and NGOs working at the local level was an important part of the planning process. In the first stage, local communities, people's representatives, and eminent persons were consulted on the formulation of a vision document and related aspects of development of the town. After analysing the views and opinions of people, a vision statement and a conceptual development plan were prepared. In the second stage, the conceptual plan was shared with the public to incorporate their views and suggestions. After the preparation of the development plan, written comments were invited from the stakeholders. This was made a statutory requirement.

The scale of operations inevitably led to the need for grievance redressal mechanisms. For instance, there were some cases where people could not prove their title and/or proof of residence. Another big challenge was accommodating those who were living as tenants or had rented shops; they didn't own them. About 1,800 legal literacy camps in 20 talukas were organised by the government, in collaboration with NGOs, to provide legal aid to the victims. In some cases, they were accommodated through existing schemes like Indira Awas Yojana[3]. But, more importantly, the district judge was declared as an ombudsman to receive complaints and petitions. Mishra says that, by October 2003, the Ombudsman had received 47,156 petitions in various districts, out of which 46,182 (99 per cent) had been addressed by 2004.[4]

There was also a state-level ombudsman appointed through the High Court for attending to the grievances and complaints of citizens against the government. The chief minister's instructions were that if a citizen

3 Ibid., p. 150.
4 Ibid., p. 123.

goes to the ombudsman against any official or politician, the government should not provide a lawyer to defend that official. There would be no arguments from the government side. If the ombudsman decides that the government must recompense the complainant in such and such manner, the government would abide by the verdict without any argument. This decision was taken within the first few weeks of Modi's taking over as CM.

Modi says, "We solved 33,000 problems through that process. It was such a mammoth task of reconstruction; at the end of it, we did not have a single case of complaint. It is possible those who wanted X amount by way of compensation got only Y amount. Government schemes do not allow for 100 per cent compensation. So, we could give only what the established protocols allowed. No one complained that they did not get what was promised. But, at the end of it, there wasn't a single case where a person entitled to get X amount did not receive his/her due."

The Gujarat government has won international acclaim and awards for its rehabilitation work in Kutch not just in the immediate aftermath, but also for turning Kutch into an attractive tourist and investment destination. These include the United Nations Sasakawa Award for outstanding work in the field of disaster management and risk reduction, as well as the UNESCO Asia Pacific Heritage Award for reconstruction of a historic gurudwara damaged during the earthquake.

Independent Quality Control of Construction

Another interesting feature of the reconstruction programme was independent technical audit and quality control of the houses through a process of third-party audit, so that they conform to hazard-resistant standards. There were three agencies, namely, NCCBM, the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), and IIT Powai, which developed a manual for quality checks on the buildings being reconstructed. They also developed a training programme for engineers who were provided with mobile testing labs to undertake on-site quality testing.[5] Anil Das says:

> Initially, many of the NGOs—be it Action Aid or local ones—were opposed to this outside monitoring. They acted high and mighty and said they needed total freedom to implement the construction projects as they thought fit. In

5 Ibid., p. 151.

> the early stages, there was a high degree of non-compliance by the NGOs. But Modi did another smart thing to counter this arrogance. He gave full powers to the GSDMA to take swift and firm action against those refusing to comply with set quality standards—after giving each defaulter due notice and opportunity to improve.
>
> The compliance graph improved dramatically after the GSDMA demolished 5-6 houses that did not meet the quality control test. That sent a very strong message and there was a sudden improvement in the quality of construction as well as earthquake resistance compliance. Moreover, once every family got the required supervisory skills and knew the government backed them, they too ensured discipline.

Mishra says, "By the end of January 2004, as many as 901,150 out of 928,369 houses were repaired and reconstruction of 186,967 out of 215,255 houses was completed. Overall, 95 per cent of the repair and reconstruction of houses was completed by January. In some cases, house-owners living outside the state did not start reconstruction work. So there appeared a gap in reaching the full target."[6]

Total Comprehensive Insurance Cover

The government also decided that all the houses that were reconstructed would be insured. The GSDMA invited expressions of interest from insurance companies, which would be willing to co-insure with the Guaranteed Investment Funds (GIF). Five insurance companies were selected, of which IFFCO-TOKIO is a private company and the other four are public sector general insurance companies. Different districts or parts of districts were allocated to the companies for the purpose of insurance of houses.

The insurance covers 14 types of risks including fire, earthquake, explosion, cyclone, and flood. The coverage is for a period of ten years. All the houses had to be compulsorily insured, whereas it was optional for other categories of houses. The premium rate was fixed by the Tariff Advisory Committee at Rs. 349.10 for an insured sum of Rs. 1 lakh. The premium amount was deducted when the third installment was paid to the beneficiary. The amount of the sum insured ranged from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 2 lakhs, keeping in view the size of the dwelling unit and the location

6 Ibid., p. 126.

rural or urban. In order to spread the risk, different districts/sub-districts were allotted to different companies.

Village-wise lists of insured persons were prepared and given as a group insurance. A list of insured persons is kept at the taluka office and each beneficiary was given a certificate indicating the insurance of his house. Even if the insurance certificate is lost, the insured person can make his claim based on the group insurance certificate available at the taluka office. In the event of a disaster affecting a large number of people, the Taluka Development Officer (TDO) is expected to facilitate completion of procedural formalities in respect of the insurance claims.[7]

The government also brought in 100 per cent education insurance cover for each and every student as well as household in Gujarat by purchasing bulk insurance policies for the entire population so that if a student lost his/her parents due to any mishap, his/her education is fully covered by the insurance policy. It also means that if someone's home is destroyed or damaged in any calamity, they would also be covered by this insurance.

Kutch Reconstruction: A Global Role Model

Anil Das, who has worked in other states of India as well as in Bihar says:

> Modi's handling of Kutch reconstruction has become a role model for the rest of the world. By contrast, the promised reconstruction of houses after the Kosi floods is still dragging, though it has been 5 years since the floods ravaged the region. The World Bank gave Bihar a grant of US$ 250 million for that work. Till date, US$ 200 million are lying unspent and there is no system to assess how well the money already utilised has been spent. Nitish is a control freak because he is power obsessed, not outcome obsessed. He has no real commitment to deliver, and he treats his officers with disdain. As a result, Bihar governance is in doldrums. His officers have no freedom whatsoever.
>
> People accuse Modi of being a control freak. But his control mechanisms produce positive results because he is obsessive about outcomes and timelines and monitors them very meticulously. However, after setting goals he leaves his bureaucrats free to implement the agreed upon tasks in the manner they find best. Modi gives them a long rope and all the freedom and support to be innovative. He also makes sure to make permanent institutional arrangements in each such arena so that there is a systematic transformation in Gujarat.

7 Ibid., p. 153.

Institutionalising Disaster Management

But Modi did not rest at merely handling that one disaster well. He went on to institutionalise a fighting fit system of disaster management in the state, which is also acknowledged globally because it constantly upgrades its capacities.

The efficiency of Gujarat's disaster management system was put to test in 2005, when there was a massive flood in Surat. Their emergency team operated with lightning speed. The Institute for Disaster Management set up in Gujarat is considered among the best in the country. Modi says:

> During Atal ji's government, we were promised Rs. 200 crores for our Disaster Management Institute. But the UPA government, that came into power subsequently, did not honour that promise. Therefore, we built it with our own strength. We had already developed enough expertise on the subject to lecture and teach the rest of the world.
>
> For instance, many of the states in India did not know that they come in the G5 zone, which is the most vulnerable as far as earthquakes are concerned. So, we organised a seminar with the best international experts to educate various state governments about the vulnerability of their regions. It is only after that workshop that administrations in various metros began to take some constructive steps in this direction.
>
> When Nitish Kumar was Railway Minister in Atal ji's government, I told him that we were willing to train railway employees in disaster management since the railways have a big role to play in such situations. But, when Atal ji's government changed, it all collapsed. The training module for disaster management we had developed could have been put to national use. But, since the last nine years, the UPA government has not allowed it to serve the country because they treat Gujarat as an enemy state.
>
> However, the UPA government gave us an indirect compliment by copying the Gujarat law on disaster management to enact national legislation without altering a full stop or comma. Their team came and met me a couple of times. When the tsunami hit southern India in 2004, their disaster management team also came and spent 15 days in Gujarat to learn from our model of rebuilding shattered lives.

Since Gujarat continued to hone its disaster management expertise, it comes in handy whenever there is an emergency situation anywhere in India or globally. When the big tsunami came in Japan, the Gujarat

government was the first one to inform Japan that they were willing to send assistance teams. But such teams can go to foreign countries only through the Government of India and Gujarat doesn't fit into the UPA's scheme of things. The Japanese had a massive nuclear disaster. Had the Gujarat team been allowed to go, they could have picked up a lot of knowledge about how to protect ourselves from similar disasters. But the GOI did not like Gujarat's offer and their team was not allowed to go.

Gujarat was the first state in India to have made a special act for the purpose of assigning specific responsibility to lay down who is expected to do what if a tragedy occurs at some place. The state also carried out a full audit of school security. It trained children to respond in case another disaster struck the area. The process of capacity building is an ongoing one. The fire brigade of every *nagarpalika* has the most modern firefighting equipment. Even today, yearly demo and drills are carried out for all school children, including for fire accidents. For capacity building, Gujarat has trained all its officials and employees, including peons and drivers, to respond to emergency situations. Its teams have travelled to various countries to study disaster management systems and incorporate them at home.

Gujarat today has the best of equipment for handling disasters, including slab cutters and all the rest. But, this is all combined with lightning speed responses from Modi himself. I remember, while I was travelling through Vapi district, there was a road accident on the highway. But the collector with whom I had fixed an appointment cancelled all work and was at the accident site within minutes so that he could report first hand to Gandhinagar on the measures being taken to reach accident victims to hospital speedily.

Modi who takes a great deal of personal interest in keeping the disaster management system tuned to the latest advances in the field says:

> The Gujarat government has played a key role in shaping the disaster management module prepared by Sri Lanka. Similarly, Iran took 50-60 per cent of our module for their rehabilitation measures after an earthquake hit the region. The post-Taliban rehabilitation work in Afghanistan was based on a plan prepared by an officer of the Gujarat government. The Taliban had destroyed numerous houses and one of our officers worked out a plan of action for them for effective rehabilitation. Even the Chinese government sent a team recently to study the Gujarat model. They had a 7-day joint workshop

with the Gujarat team to share their respective experiences. The Gujarat Disaster Management Institute has built a global reputation. The subject has been introduced as a part of regular syllabus in all technology universities in Gujarat. No matter what each faculty specialises in, they have to include disaster management as an additional subject. The state has undertaken intensive manpower training for this.

This is a continuously evolving process. We study the ongoing new developments closely and try to include them in our own system. Whenever a disaster strikes anywhere in the world, Gujarat is among the first to get the information because they have the most modern technology and a proper system in place, which is operational 24x7.

Modi says that in 2003, he had written to the governors of all states and requested them as chancellors of universities to send two Ph.D students for research in Gujarat—to study various aspects of earthquake aftermath—from the initial rescue work to later relief and rehabilitation. In any other country, there would have been 100 Ph.Ds on this. He says, "I offered to take care of the entire expense of those students including their stay—for two years. My idea was that if such research was done, we would have got an opportunity to understand the plus and minus points of the whole process. The plus points would have provided a road map to others; and if we found minus points, they would have helped us in making necessary corrections for future. I am sorry to say that no one came. None of the governors considered it a priority issue,"

Modi's opponents have assured that none of this got any attention outside Gujarat. Since our academia and the social science community has deeply internalised anti-Modi propaganda, no social scientist has bothered to study the story of Kutch rising out of its own ashes, of its transformation from a subsistence economy to among the fastest growing economies of India. Unfortunately, even the BJP has not taken the trouble to let the rest of India know this story.

CHAPTER 8

Congress Panic at "Whirlwind" Muslim Support for NaMo

Modi's First Election from Rajkot in February 2002

There is an atmosphere of mourning within the Congress Party over the declaration of support to the BJP by 28 Muslim organisations reputed to be doing good work for the welfare of their society.
February 9, 2002, *Sanjh Times*

With what face are Congress leaders going to ask for the votes of the Muslim community? If they have done even one thing for the Muslim samaj in the last 35 years, they should present its account in two days. Rajkot's nationalist Muslim community is well aware of the amount of good works done by the BJP government for the Muslim community in Rajkot. Congress leaders have now realised that when they go for mass contact in Muslim areas, the Muslim community is not welcoming them in any way.
Kaderbhai Salot quoted in ***Sanjh Times*, February 11, 2002**

In the booths with over 70 per cent Muslim vote, BJP is far ahead... Nationalist Muslims seem to have had a big hand in the big victory achieved by Narendra Modi ji in the Vidhan Sabha bye-election.
***Sanjh Times* on Modi's election victory on February 25, 2002**

Those who have come to believe the Congress and Leftist propaganda that Narendra Modi is a "polarising" figure and that he was sent to Gujarat to convert it into a laboratory for aggressive militant Hindutva—involving systematic brutal suppression of minorities, especially the Muslims and the Christians—would do well to study reports of his campaign for getting elected to Gujarat Assembly within weeks of his appointment as chief minister on October 4, 2001. Narendra Modi filed his nomination papers on January 31, 2002 to fight his first ever

election from Rajkot. He had already set into motion enough governance reforms to appear as a threat to varied vested interests. Therefore all such forces joined hands to defeat Modi by means fair or foul. The following account will show that the campaign against him was no different from the current sleaze-soaked campaign against Modi to eliminate him out of the prime ministerial race. The Congress went on a do-or-die mission to finish him off politically not because he had done anything bad, but because he had already set many new records, especially with regard to earthquake rehabilitation. Their desperation reached hysterical proportions when they found Muslims also deserting the Congress and gravitating towards Modi.

Before filing his nomination, Modi gave a call to the people of Rajkot that he will live up to the trust reposed on him by them. Responding to various charges levelled against him by the Congress, he said,

> …As a worker of the BJP I am trying to win the hearts of people. We don't believe in negativity. But I know very well that the Congress cannot give up its negativity. It only knows how to attack and oppose—they have opposed the introduction of POTO (Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance), they have opposed Lok Kalyan Melas, opposed Samras Gaon, opposed strengthening of Gram Sabhas. Will such negativity do good for Gujarat? Is it a crime for the government to be proactive and work efficiently? Voters should give the Congress Party a fitting reply…I want to assure the people of Rajkot that whatever task you assign to me, I will not be found lacking in delivering results...

During the course of my travels I had heard from various knowledgeable Muslims that Modi had very close personal relations with spiritual leaders of many Muslim sects. But having been fed on negative propaganda, I wasn't quite prepared for the totally different picture that emerged out of news reports of his first election campaign. Far from facing hostility, there was actually a giant wave of support in favour of Narendra Modi among various Muslim groups and organisations. This created utter panic among Congressmen because he was taking away from the Congress Party its most loyal and captive vote bank. Modi managed to accomplish what even Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the most liberal face of BJP, had failed in doing. Though Muslims liked Vajpayee personally, they never voted for him or BJP under him.

Respected Muslim leaders who had spent a lifetime with the Congress deserted the Party and began joining the BJP when Modi became CM. Therefore, Congress leaders responded with unprecedented fury and desperation to defeat Modi. But before I come to that story, let me describe the circumstances under which NaMo landed in Rajkot for his first electoral battle.

Rajkot-based Vijaybhai Rupani, who is currently secretary of BJP's Minority Front, had played a leading role in organising NaMo's first election campaign. He also knows Modi intimately from the time Modi was the general secretary of BJP in Gujarat. This is the account he provided me of Narendra Modi's first election.

> Narendrabhai had been sent to Gujarat as its chief minister without ever having fought any election. But he had to win an election from some place or the other within six months. So there was a discussion in our party about the most suitable constituency for fielding Narendrabhai. There were many people who wanted him to fight from their respective rural constituencies. But the Party wanted a prominent urban constituency for him. Our first choice was the city of Ahmedabad.

I asked Rupani if there was any substance in the allegation levelled by Modi opponents that Modi fell out with Haren Pandya because Pandya refused to vacate his seat for Modi? This is Vijaybhai's version, corroborated by several other BJP leaders:

> There is no truth whatsoever in the allegation that Narendrabhai tried to force Haren Pandya out. Narendrabhai made it clear he was not going to ask anyone to vacate his seat for him. He never once said to Pandya to give up his safe seat for him. The decision to field Modi from Ellis Bridge was a joint decision of the BJP and RSS because it was considered the safest seat for the Party. Everyone felt that since Narendrabhai was fighting his first election, that too as CM, he should be given a safe seat.
>
> It was the party's senior leaders who communicated this decision to Pandya. Since Narendrabhai had worked for long years in Ahmedabad's Ellis Bridge constituency and had intimate contacts with several people there from his days as RSS *pracharak* and later as BJP organising secretary, the Party decided to field him from there. But Haren Pandya, who was the sitting MLA from that

area, refused to vacate his seat. At that time, there was intense discussion in the Party over this blunt refusal to accept the Party's mandate since everyone felt the seat belonged to the Party not to any individual.

So the next choice fell on Rajkot where Vajubhai was the MLA. He in fact volunteered to vacate his seat saying that he is a disciplined worker of the BJP; this seat also belongs to the Party, not him He immediately resigned and went with hundreds of party workers in a procession to Gandhinagar to personally invite Narendrabhai to come fight from Rajkot. All these decisions were taken in a party meeting held at my house. Vajubhai's gesture and the manner in which he celebrated Narendrabhai being fielded from Rajkot generated a great deal of enthusiasm among party workers.

The significant thing about that election campaign was that Narendrabhai left the entire conduct of the election campaign to the Party since he was focusing all his energy on rehabilitation of earthquake victims and putting the system of administration in place. It was BJP workers who did all the worrying and planning to ensure that he win the election. Narendrabhai had helped lead numerous elections for others. But he had never fought his own election. However, he knew all that is required to win an election. So he supervised from Gandhinagar what kind of programs, meetings etc. should be organised, as well as the tone and tenor of the election campaign. But the real ground work was done by party workers since he was handling his onerous responsibilities as a newly-appointed first time chief minister.

BJP Dissidents Join Hands with Congress

By all accounts Keshubhai Patel made common cause with Congress leaders to give hell to Narendra Modi. Rupani says,

> When Keshubhai was asked to campaign for Modi in Rajkot, he plain refused. Since he was from Rajkot and his entire political career had been built in this city, everyone felt that he should have done his bit for Modi ji. The whole party, including Narendra bhai, pleaded with him. But it had no effect. He was dead against Narendrabhai from day one. In fact, he did all he could to instigate his entire Patel community against Modi, saying Narendra Modi will destroy the clout of Patels. But a substantial section of Patels supported Narendrabhai because he avoided playing the caste card and talked of the collective well-being of all Gujaratis. In the 2012 election also we got big support from the Patels of Saurashtra.

A news report in the *Sanjh Times* on February 15, 2002 wrote: "Angry at having been removed as the chief minister, Keshubhai Patel's rage has not yet calmed down… He refused to budge despite the BJP leaders having gone to placate him…" To continue with Rupani's account:

> The election was in February 2002 and that is the very month in which the Godhra massacre happened. His warm relations with the Muslim community can be gauged from the fact that Narendrabhai had addressed several mammoth meetings in Muslim areas. In Rajkot there is a big Muslim population of Dawoodi Boras who always dress in their traditional attire. Dawoodi Bora youth organised a motor cycle rally in support of Narendrabhai. Dressed in their traditional attires, they went all over the city asking people to vote for Narendrabhai.. And sure he got a solid chunk of Muslim vote.
>
> Another noteworthy thing about Narendrabhai's campaign was that there was no negativity in it. He did not even attack the Congress Party. In fact, he would start by saying, "I haven't come here to defeat anyone. I have only come to present my views before you. Election is not just a matter of winning or losing. But fighting elections is an integral part of democratic processes. That is why I am here to fight this election. I haven't come here to defeat or sink the fortunes of anyone. I have come to assure you that if the people of Rajkot vote for me, I will never let you lower your head in shame because of me."
>
> He gave very *samvedansheel* speeches during that election. No question of Narendrabhai attacking any community or attempting to polarise the voters on religious lines. He also reiterated that he will neither gobble public funds not will he let anyone do it *(mein khata nahin hoon aur na kisi ko khane doonga.).* The image he conveyed to the public at large at that time has been maintained till date.
>
> But he was able to give no more than four days for election campaign in Rajkot. He would come once a week for one day. He could not give more time because he was busy with earthquake rehabilitation in Kutch and other government work.

This account by Vijaybhai Rupani was at so much variance with what I had been led to believe, that I decided to check out contemporary news reports published in local dailies that were reporting on the day-to-day developments of that campaign. They provide a very insightful account of the genesis and wellsprings of the Modi demonisation campaign which continues till date.

Prominent Muslim Leaders Campaign for Modi

Kaderbhai Salot, a leading Muslim of Rajkot, played a key role in mobilising support of Muslim groups for Modi and in turning the Muslim vote tide in his favour. For example, a Rajkot-based newspaper, *Sanjh Times,* of February 6, 2002 carried the following front-page news: "On account of internal rifts in the Congress, Kaderbhai Salot and colleagues leave the party. More than 200 Muslim workers of the Congress Party joined BJP. Kaderbhai is in the mood for new *hulchul* (ferment) despite shortage of time." The report goes on to say:

> Due to the efforts of Kaderbhai Salot, the vice chairman of the Gujarat State Minority Finance and Development Department and the BJP Minority Cell General Secretaries for Rajkot, Aijaz Bapu Bukhari and Altafbhai Suma - more than 200 young Muslims merged in the *kesariya* (saffron) colour... Kaderbhai is in a mood to do some big things in a short time
>
> The 200 Muslims who joined BJP were welcomed and congratulated by senior leaders including Vijaybhai Rupani.

It is noteworthy, that the first Muslim exodus from the Congress happened within 5 days of Modi's filing his nomination papers from Rajkot. On February 9, 2002, *the Sanjh Times* published the following front page news item under the headline: "Chief Minister Narendra Modi gets the support of 28 social service-oriented Muslim organisations: Deep disturbance within Congress Party over this support of Muslim organisations." It goes on to say:

> There is an atmosphere of mourning within the Congress Party over the declaration of support to the BJP by 28 Muslim organisations reputed to be doing good work for the welfare of their society. [This happened] in a meeting held at the residence of a very popular Muslim community leader - Kaderbhai Salot, who is also the vice chairman of Gujarat State Minority Finance and Development Department.
>
> Since the last three days Congress leaders have been going into Muslim neighbourhoods to contact people. But the Congress is alarmed by the fact that the Muslim community is not giving them a good response. They now realise that they are not going to get the Muslim community vote this time.
>
> In the declaration of support to Narendrabhai by the Muslim community, Hussain Committee, Haider Sabil Committee, Jam Jam Sabil Committee, Ekta Nayaz Committee of ward No. 1, Hussaini Voice Committee, Jam Jam Sabil

Committee, Panjeetal Sabil Committee, Ashiq Hussain Niyaz Committee, Yuva Muslim of ward No. 14, Ekta Blood Donation Committee, Manzoor Hussain Voice Committee, Khwaja Garib-e-Nawaz Committee, Ekta Samooh Lagnotsav Ayojan Committee of ward no. 11, and ward No. 16, along with several other committees joined in a mammoth gathering.

In this meeting members who declared their support for Chief Minister Narendra Modi shared information about the excellent work done by the BJP - Its workers going from house to house in Muslim neighborhoods to provide them proper arrangements for Haj. [In addition, the BJP has] upgraded the Minorities Board into a Corporation, provided land for *kabristan* (grave yard) in Muslim areas, provided loans worth crores of rupees to help 571 Muslims to stand on their own feet.

[Muslim leaders] publicly took on the responsibility of taking members of the Muslim community to the polling booths of their area. Kaderbhai Salot said that nationalist Muslims will vote for the BJP; and this will be proven when the votes are counted in those wards. This is how the name of Rajkot and of Muslim *samaj* will shine bright (*roshan hoga*).

On February 11, 2002 the *Sanjh Times* reported that Kaderbhai Salot issued the following challenge to the Congress Party: "If the Congress leaders of Rajkot have done even one bit of work for the Muslim *samaj,* they should announce it in two days or else I will announce the [good] works done by BJP." The report quotes Kaderbhai as follows:

The Vice Chairman of Gujarat State Minorities Finance and Development Department Kaderbhai Salot has posed a pointed question to the Congress leaders of Rajkot saying, "With what face are Congress leaders going to ask for the votes of the Muslim community? If they have done even one thing for the Muslim *samaj* in the last 35 years, they should present its account in two days. I warn the Congress leaders, who pretend to be the well wishers/sympathisers of the Muslim community, that Rajkot's nationalist Muslim community is well aware of the amount of good works done by the BJP government for them in Rajkot. Congress leaders have now realised that when they go for mass contact in Muslim areas, the Muslim community is not welcoming them in any way. Seeing this, Congress leaders should learn that none of their stratagems are going to succeed with the Muslims."

An "Earthquake-like" Situation for Congress

As described in earlier chapters, since after taking over as CM, Modi was totally engrossed in earthquake rehabilitation work and fixing the administrative machinery to become more responsive to people's needs, he came to campaign in Rajkot only on weekends. And yet he created a whirlwind of support in his favour. Even Muslim women joined to express support for him in public meetings. This is what the *Sanjh Times* had to say on February 11, 2002:

> The bye-election for the Rajkot assembly seat is warming up big time during the second round of campaign on Saturday and Sunday. BJP candidate and Chief Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modi spread a wave of enthusiasm among the enlightened voters of Rajkot. In each of the small 12-14 ward meetings and community meetings, wise and enlightened public was present. They gave an indication of voting for the Lotus and give a big margin of victory to the chief minister. While campaigning like a whirlwind in the meetings of Soni Samaj, Darzi Samaj, Kshatriyas, intellectuals, and so on, Modi appealed to them to make the BJP victorious.
>
> For the first time, Bohra Muslim sisters publicly welcomed the chief minister and appealed to the people to remain loyal to the country.

On February 13 the following news item with the following headline appeared in the same newspaper: "A big Muslim *sammelan* (public meeting) organised in favor of CM Narendra Modi. All attempts by the Congress Party to stop this *sammelan* had failed. 50 Muslim leaders who had worked for the Congress Party for the last 40 years joined the BJP." The news item goes on to say:

> In Ramnathpara in the *wada* of the Ghanchi Samaj, a mammoth *sammelan* was held. **The presence of the heads of diverse Muslim communities and respected leaders of Muslim samaj and thousands of young Muslims has created an earthquake-like situation within the Congress.** The sammelan was organised by Kaderbhai Salot, the vice chairman of the Gujarat Minority Finance and Development Department. [Emphasis mine]
>
> In this *sammelan* several Muslim leaders, who had a 40-year long association with the Congress, left the party to join the BJP on account of the divisive politics of the Congress Party. These leaders had, for decades, mobilised the

> Muslim vote for the Congress Party. Those who joined the BJP issued an appeal to Muslims to boycott the Congress in the coming election and resolved to vote for the BJP. At this the Muslims present in that meeting declared a boycott of the Congress Party with thunderous applause and by shouting slogans….

Modi's Promises & Muslim Response

I have already quoted Narendra Modi's message to the people of Rajkot on the day he filed his nomination. There wasn't a touch of negativity in it. Even in his later speeches his focus was on development issues and an inclusive agenda of growth. Far from seeking religious or any other polarisation, Modi either talked of the new agenda of governance he had set into motion or of his vision for *Garvi* (proud) Gujarat.

This is how the *Sanjh Times* of February 14, 2002 reported his speech that weekend. "Narendra Modi declares that Gujarat will be made into a *Nandanvan* [the legendry forest where Krishna performed his *leela*]." The news report goes on to add:

> BJP's Rajkot candidate Narendrabhai Modi was given a traditional welcome amidst a mammoth gathering (*Manav Samanvay*) in ward no. 16. Addressing a grand meeting organised at Popatpra Chowk, Chief Minister Narendra Modi said that for the parched land of Gujarat, the thirsty people, animals and birds of Gujarat, the "*Neer of Narmada*" (waters of Narmada) is the ideal solution. For the welfare of 5 crore people of Gujarat even bowing my head before others will be a matter of pride for me. Saying this, he talked of comprehensive development (*sarvangin vikas*) of Gujarat. Commenting sharply on the Congress government, he said that what the Congress failed to do in 45 years, has been done by the BJP in 45 days. Abjuring the *bicholiya pratha* (tradition of toutism) of the Congress government, the BJP government has ensured that full payments reach the people through Lok Kalyan Melas.... We will not look back in our endeavours to create a prosperous future for Gujarat. Saying that in the hands of the BJP, Gujarat has a very proud (*atyant gauravsheel*) future, the chief minister said in his inimitable style that BJP government has taught a fitting lesson to those who are into conspiratorial activities....
>
> In the end, the chief minister said that *Narmada Neer* is the dream of Gujarat. The government of Madhya Pradesh is dilly-dallying in taking decisions over this issue. This is because if the Narmada waters come into Gujarat, the BJP government will gain strength.... But this time, Respected Atal ji's intervention

> and the remarkable decision he took regarding Narmada to help Gujarat realise its dream of transforming this state into a *Nandanvan* has made a difference…

On February 16, the *Sanjh Times* rubbed further salt in Congress wounds by proclaiming in a headline: "A *Samarthan Sabha* (Endorsement Meeting) for Narendrabhai - Muslim community organised a powerful public meeting." In the meeting Muslim leaders reiterated how Narendra Modi had swiftly redressed long pending demands of the Muslim community such as land for an additional kabristan and measures to strengthen weaker sections among Muslim community. To quote from the report:

> In support of Chief Minister Narendrabhai Modi, Muslim brothers and sisters gathered together for a mammoth Muslim *sammelan* (public meeting) in Bhomeshwar, in the prime area of Kaderbhai Salot, the vice chairman of the State Minorities Finance and Development Department.
>
> In this *sammelan*, Kaderbhai told the Muslims present there that the BJP government has given a subsidy of Rs 20,000 per Haj pilgrim and made arrangements for direct flights to Jeddah from Ahmedabad itself instead of [hajis] having to go via Mumbai. In addition, Muslim women have been provided training in tailoring, in zari work and so on in 15 different centres in... In this *sammelan* people of Mir Jamaat were present in large numbers and expressed open support for Narendrabhai.

On February 18, 2002 the *Sanjh times* headline says: "A *vishal sammelan* (a mammoth gathering) of Muslims in support of BJP in the Sadar zone."

> Under the presidentship of Vajubhai Vada, a public meeting of Muslims was organised in Sadar Zone, to declare support to Chief Minister Narendrabhai Modi. In this meeting Muslim women and men were present in large numbers.
>
> Addressing Muslim women, the Chairperson of Gujarat State's Tourism Department Vasuben Trivedi said that the Congress Party has rendered Muslim women illiterate and backward whereas the BJP government's Minority Finance and Development Department has set up sewing, embroidery, and zari centres.
>
> Seeing the presence of Vanjibhai Bada in this *sammelan*, Muslim leaders became very emotional because he had given Rs. 60,000 for installing lights in the Muslim *kabristan* situated in Sadar. A decision to give 7 acres of additional

> land for the *kabristan* had also been taken [by the BJP government]. But given the opposition to it by Congressmen, the process has been stalled. Various Muslim leaders honoured Vanjibhai by donning shawls on him.

The report then goes on to list the names of numerous Muslim leaders who were present at the meeting, which was conducted by Bashirbhai Memon.

"I am Not a Ruler, I am a Servant"

The tone and tenor of Modi's election campaign can also be well gauged by the February 19, 2002 *Sanjh Times* report of Modi's speech with the following headline: "I am not the *nath* (ruler) of Gujarat, I am a *das* (servant)." This is in the tune with his promise as the prime ministerial candidate that people should not vote for him as PM but as a 'chowkidar' (security guard) on their behalf who would not let any dirty hand loot the public treasury or public assets. The news report goes on to quote Modi as having given the following promises to his voters:

> "I've not come to defeat or to put down anyone…. I've come to win the hearts of the people of Rajkot. People should recognise the character of Congressmen who deprive people of Rajkot of water."
>
> Chief Minister Narendrabhai Modi who has established himself as a winning candidate of the BJP has already found an unshakable place in the hearts of the people of Rajkot. He displayed a very soft heart today when he gave a message to the people of Rajkot saying, "I am not the ruler of Gujarat, I'm a servant of Gujarat. The environment in which I grew up, *sewa* is treated as a *dharma*, not power." He said, "In my entire life there has been no occasion when I had to beg anyone for anything. This is the first time in my life that in Rajkot I have the occasion to ask for votes. I assure the people of Rajkot that I will return with interest whatever the people of Rajkot give me."
>
> Talking of his own temperament, Shri Narendrabhai Modi said, "Friends, I've not come here to defeat anyone; I've not come here to put down anyone. I've come here to win the hearts of the people of Rajkot and to live in their hearts." Explaining his development perspective for Rajkot, Shri Narendrabhai Modi said "there are many opportunities for development in Rajkot. There are numerous avenues for growth in the domain of education. After the Gujarat earthquake we have decided to develop earthquake management system in Gujarat. One of the departments connected with that work will be set up in Rajkot. I want that Rajkot should become a *shiksha dham* (centre of education)

and a centre of hope for the people of this region. Rajkot has the distinction of being considered the foremost city of Saurashtra. Who doesn't know that in order to work in that direction, Narmada will be the fountainhead of progress, not just for Rajkot, but entire Saurashtra and Kutch?"

Presenting the '*Narmada Sarvade*' (Narmada, the upliftment of all) chain of thought before the people, Shri Narendrabhai Modi said that if the Narmada Project is implemented, there will be an end to the water problem, fodder will grow plentifully, *godhan* (cattle wealth) will become abundant, and the rivers of milk and curd will start flowing again. Despite this, the Congress Party, which had laid the foundation stone of Narmada Project in 1961, did not complete it in 40 long years. Due to the [obstructions placed by] the Madhya Pradesh Congress Party and the Congress government, there is shortage of water in Rajkot. The wise citizens of Rajkot should ask the Congressmen, why are you putting obstacles in Madhya Pradesh to prevent Narmada Project from getting implemented?

Congress has complained that BJP government's order for the closure of the illegal butcher houses was a violation of the [election] code of conduct. Referring to this Shri Narendrabhai Modi said, "Please ask Congressmen whether their candidates are in favour of running illegal butcher houses? Do they want to protect the hapless animals or the butchers?"

At the end, appealing to the people for taking their votes as *puja* flowers in the temple of democracy (*lokshahika mandir*) on February 21 in order to support the BJP electorally, Shri Narendrabhai Modi said, "I have come to fight this election on a constructive agenda. Being constructive is part of my nature. I have faith that looking at my constructive approach, the people of Rajkot will assess very minutely, weigh carefully, measure accurately and declare me successful in this *agnipariksha* (fire ordeal)."

On February 20, 2002 *the Sanjh Times* gave the following synopsis of Modi's election speech in Rajkot. With the caption: "*Sneh* (affection) filled message to the people of Rajkot by Narendrabhai Modi."

Samaj Seva (serving society) and *Rashtra Seva* (serving the nation) is the *mahamantra* (the big mantra) of my life. This will lay the foundation for taking Gujarat to great heights. I wish that the waters of Narmada reach Rajkot and Saurashtra. I seek your valuable co-operation through your votes in taking my *shraddha* (faith) to its destination.

It is my *tamanna* (deep desire) to do something for our society; I am inspired by the desire to live and die for my country; …I want the glory of Gujarat to reach the whole world. …I've used the *mantra* of *lokprem* (love for people) through Lok Kalyan Melas organised by the government to make the administrative machinery an instrument of *lokseva* (service of the people). In less than 4 months, I've signed an agreement with Astra Mines in Russia's Moscow to connect Gujarat to the global economy. To dedicate the entire government machinery to the service of people and for implementing Narmada and other major schemes …has been my visible endeavor.

This is the beginning of my attempts to fulfill the responsibilities handed over to me by the Bhartiya Janata Party. I need the co-operation of the people of Rajkot for Gujarat's well-being and all round development. Your vote is invaluable for the Gujarat of tomorrow. I have faith that you will make our state *agrani* (progressive) Gujarat by voting for the BJP and ensuring our victory. We have to bring about total development of Gujarat through honest hard work. In that endeavour your vote will generate a new self-confidence in me. You have always trusted BJP. I pray that I be blessed with the strength to live up to your faith. That is all I have to say to the wise citizens of Rajkot.

To the baseless propaganda of the Congress, I have only this to say: *"Hey Prabhu!, kuprachar karne walon ko subuddhi dena aur sadvichar karne wale ko shakti dena. Aur bus Rajkot ki janata matraroopi shakti Bhajpa ko degi, aisi meri shraddha hai."* (Oh lord! Please give wisdom to those indulging in evil propaganda and give strength to those who live by good and good pure thoughts). It is my faith that the people of Rajkot will bestow their votes to BJP. Narendra Modi offers his *pranam* to the citizens of Rajkot.

A box item on the same page posed Narendra Modi's challenge to the Congress Party in the following words: "Congressmen, who are today coming to you for votes in order to get into power, where were they when a shroud of death had covered Gujarat following the earthquake?" The box item also carried the following promises made by Modi. He is quoted as saying, "I will:

- Give Rajkot a modern scientific institution for measuring and managing earthquakes.
- Make Rajkot the hub of tourism development in Saurashtra and Kutch.
- Give priority to making Rajkot a centre for excellence in education.
- Make Rajkot become the premier city, for not just Saurashtra, but also for Kutch."

Modi's determination to complete the Narmada Project in order to take its waters to the parched regions of Gujarat are a red herring for self-styled environmentalists. But given its popularity within all sections of Gujarati society, and given that Congress Party under Nehru had started the construction of Narmada dam, the Gujarat Congress leaders dared not oppose it openly within the state. That is why they started patronising NGOs and Medha Patkar's *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) to mobilise national and international opinion against it by launching a defamation campaign against BJP government in Gujarat in general and Narendra Modi in particular.

Teesta Setalvad, Shabnam Hashmi etc came soon after. It is noteworthy that almost all of Medha Patkar's protest actions and *yatras* were carried out in Madhya Pradesh, where Congress chief minister rolled out a red carpet for Medha's high profile protestors like Arundhati Roy and Shabana Azmi who made the anti Narmada movement politically fashionable with generous support from American and European funding agencies. Medha dared not enter Gujarat for launching her protests despite solid though covert support from the Congress Party.

Muslim Women Campaign for NaMo

To continue with the Rajkot election story, on February 19, 2002, the *Sanjh Times* reported yet again on the growing Muslim support for the BJP.

> First time in the history of Rajkot, a saffron environment has been created in Muslim areas for getting Muslim community votes. Educated Muslim women joined together for the BJP election campaign. In ward No. 1 where there are more than 4000 Muslims voters, at 10 am, Anjaliben Rupani, Kheruben Salot and the future Mayor of Bhavnagar Vibhariben Dave, under the leadership of Manjulaben Joshi, along with more than 200 educated Muslim women, came out in Muslim areas to appeal to the Muslim community to join hands and garner votes for BJP's Narendrabhai Modi.
>
> Seeing all this, the district and national level Congress leaders began to run helter-skelter. Today, in the afternoon, these women will go around in this entire area and in Mochi Bazar and on the 20th they will go around Nehru Nagar, Bajrangbadi, Rukhdiya, Maftiapara, Popatpara areas to win over Muslim votes for BJP candidate Narendra Modi on the 21st [February].

On February 25, 2002, a *Sanjh Times* headline announced Modi's victory as follows: "In the booths with over 70 per cent Muslim vote, BJP is far ahead... Muslim youth leaders are expressing gratitude to the voters. Nationalist Muslims seem to have had a big hand in the big victory achieved by Narendra Modi ji in the Vidhan Sabha bye-election." The report adds:

> In order to get Muslim community votes for the Congress, both the state level as well as the national level leaders of the Congress Party had been campaigning in Rajkot for the last 10 days. But all these leaders failed to get Muslim vote for the Congress whereas Muslim leader Kaderbhai Salot, the Vice Chairman of the Gujarat State Minorities Finance and Development Department, had organised three mammoth rallies in different areas of Rajkot as well as a Muslim women's rally in support of BJP candidate Narendrabhai Modi. He also organised 13 different group meetings in Muslim areas. To help the BJP get the Muslim vote Vijaybhai Rupani worked very hard along with Kaderbhai. As a result, election booths with over 70 per cent Muslim majority population gave a big lead to the BJP.

Why Modi Swept Muslim Vote

The following factors had contributed towards this tectonic shift of the Muslim vote in favour of Modi:

- The pro-people model of governance he had delivered was inherently inclusive – *Sabka saath sabka vikas* was being demonstrated on the ground.
- His able handling of the reconstruction work in the earthquake affected regions also demonstrated, through concrete actions, that Muslims were equal beneficiaries of the new development model.
- Modi had close personal rapport, built over decades, with a number of ordinary Muslims as well as community leaders who came all out in his support.
- In Rajkot itself, he had responded to the specific requirements of the Muslim community such as the demand for graveyard land with speed. These requests, which had remained unsatisfied for decades, were addressed within days of Modi's coming to power.
- He had upgraded the Minority Boards into full-fledged Corporations with a view to helping new entrepreneurial activities and skill development initiatives among Muslims.

And yet Modi never appealed to Muslims as a separate vote bank. He responded creatively to their legitimate social, economic and cultural requirements as citizens without pandering to their communal identity. This approach threatened the very survival of the Congress Party. Not surprisingly, the Congress Party retaliated with fury.

The next chapter describes the unethical and lawless election campaign Congress orchestrated in the very first election of Modi.

CHAPTER 9

Of Muck Throwing & Lotus Blooming

Congress's Lawless Sleazy Campaign in Modi's Pre-Godhra Election

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This Narendra Modi is going to deal a deadly blow to the Congress. He is a man of great talent and competence. He is going to prove to be a cyclone for the Congress Party.
Congress leader, Ashwinbhai Kotwal to BJP leader Vijaybhai Rupani, October 7, 2001

My philosophy is to use the stones hurled at me to make a bridge for myself; I believe in proving my critics wrong through my work. I keep saying, the more muck you throw at me, the brighter will the BJP lotus bloom. That is the nature of the lotus, it rises out of keechhad (slush) to create exquisite beauty.
Narendra Modi in personal interview 2013

Congress Party's visceral hatred of Modi came out in the very first election he fought from Rajkot in February 2002. This is borne out by the unethical and slanderous campaign they ran against him, much before before Godhra. Their hysteria sprung from the fact that their hitherto captive Muslim vote bank had abandoned them openly and defiantly, in favour of Narendra Modi. In their desperation to defeat Modi, they brazenly used lawless means to eliminate him from the race.

The unprecedented difficulties Modi faced due to Congress hostility, despite being the chief minister of the state, are borne out by news reports of that period. In addition, Vijaybhai Rupani, an old BJP colleague of Modi, who was in charge of the newly appointed chief minister's Rajkot election campaign in 2002, provided interesting insights into the reasons why Congress and its NGO allies targeted Modi with single minded obsession from day one:

Let me share an interesting incident which will explain why the Congress Party was so desperate to destroy Modi. The Congress candidate Ashwinbhai, who fought the election against Narendrabhai, is a personal friend of mine.

Narendrabhai had taken his first oath of office on October 7, 2001. On October 8, the birthday of my son, the Ajit Rupani Memorial Trust created in his name, had organised a *Bal Sangam*. We take care of poor children through this family trust. At that time, Ashwinbhai did not have the slightest idea that he would be pitted against Narendra Modi in the coming election; neither did I. I had invited Ashwinbhai as the special guest of honour in our function. After the program, Ashwinbhai and I sat down for a chat. I distinctly remember his prediction that evening. He said, "If Keshubhai had been allowed to complete his five year term, the Congress would have surely come back to power in Gujarat. *Yeh Narendra Modi bhari pad jayega Congress ko. Yeh bahut kshamata wala aadmi hai. Yeh toh Congress Party ke liye bilkul cyclone siddh hoga*." (This Narendra Modi is going to deal a deadly blow to the Congress. He is a man of great talent and competence. He is going to prove to be a cyclone for the Congress Party). I remember these were the exact words used by Ashwinbhai.

He assessed Narendrabhai so correctly because he had interacted closely with him and knew his organisational genius. The Congress Party assessed his potential very accurately and therefore did all they could to try and defeat him in his very first election. The entire top brass of Congress camped in Rajkot for nearly 10 days to campaign against Narendrabhai. Numerous top leaders from Delhi also came to campaign against Modi including Kamal Nath, Manmohan Singh. They defamed and abused him no end.

The concerted defamation campaign unleashed by the Congress Party in collusion with the Keshubhai group in the BJP was in brazen violation of the code of conduct mandated by the Election Commission. But, neither the mighty Election Commission nor the Rajkot Police came to Modi's rescue despite the fact that he was the chief minister of the state. Rupani describes what the Party went through at that time:

Narendrabhai had to put up with endless humiliations even at the hands of the bureaucracy and police since he was new to administration. Those within the police and bureaucracy who were allied to the Congress acted in openly partisan ways against the new CM.

BJP lodged complaints with the police saying the brazen slander campaign in print was against the guidelines issued by the Election Commission. Earlier

we had seen how when Shankar Singh Waghela fought his election from that same area, the police openly worked for him and virtually ran his campaign. The entire government machinery used to be put at his disposal to ensure his victory.

But in Modi's case, the police commissioner took no note of our complaints, leave alone take action against the offenders – this when Narendrabhai was the chief minister. We complained to Narendrabhai regarding the partisan conduct of the police commissioner but he said, "We are not going to pick up cudgels against the police. Let them do what they are doing. I don't want to establish a precedent that the police commissioner or any other official has to do my bidding. You handle the campaign as best as you can and present true facts before the people."

The hostility of the administration went so far that when we put up hoardings in the city, the municipal commissioner had them forcibly removed; declaring that putting up hoardings is against the guidelines of the Election Commission. This was totally bunkum because every party puts up hoardings to reach out to people and there has never been any issue about it.

Narendrabhai's hoardings were removed on the very first day. We went up to the High Court on this issue. We also approached the Election Commission against the actions of the police commissioner. But Narendrabhai insisted that we should not start a battle against the administration. That would create an image of the CM trying to bulldoze officials. He said let them do what they will. We should focus on our own work and let the people judge for themselves.

Rajkot Administration Acted at Congress Behest

The district administration played along with the Congress game because of their old links and the continuing clout of former chief ministers Keshubhai Patel and Shankar Singh Waghela. For example, on February 4, 2002 *Sanjh Samachar* reported that following a complaint from the Congress Party, the city administration had defaced the hoardings put up by the BJP as part of its election outreach.

Yesterday, as per the orders of the Election Commission, water was sprayed [to deface] the BJP hoardings put up in different locations in the city. In this regard Vijaybhai Rupani said, "Since the chief minister is fighting the election from Rajkot, BJP has ensured that the code of conduct should be meticulously observed with full commitment at every step of the election campaign. As per the regulations of the code of conduct, during elections hoardings cannot

be put up on the walls of institutions of local administration. We honoured this restriction. BJP posted its election campaign material on the personally owned spaces of various ad agencies for which they had previously obtained contracts from the Municipal Corporation. The act of spraying water on the election campaign hoardings was unworthy and unprecedented. The BJP is conducting its campaign without violating the code of conduct. This action of the Election Commission will be challenged in the Court."

The Rajkot Municipal Corporation had a Congress majority. There the municipal commissioner happily obeyed the dictates of Congress leaders and passed an order that Modi's campaign hoardings be defaced. The Election Commission also supported the misdoings of the Congress.

On February 5, 2002 *Sanjh Samachar* again reported that following a complaint from the Congress Party, the city administration had defaced 51 hoardings put up by the BJP as part of its election outreach. This was in fact ordered by Rajiv Dube, Observer, Central Election Commission. However, the BJP won this battle legally. On February 9, 2002, *Sanjh Times* reported that the Central Election Commission and the Rajkot Municipal Corporation have had to reverse the orders. The report goes on to say:

BJP's senior leader Vijay Rupani announced that BJP has won the battle in the controversy created by the Municipal Corporation over election campaign through hoardings.... He said that the BJP [had put up hoardings] We did all this while staying within the legal boundaries. Despite this, the State Election Commission had interpreted the order of 29-02-1998 in a wrong manner and declared that putting up hoardings in public places was a violation of the code of conduct....

Without giving a proper hearing to BJP's submission that it was within the law to carry out election campaign through hoardings, the official machinery had overnight removed all hoardings thus creating a big controversy. But, the Central Election Commission has now given permission to the BJP and cancelled its earlier order of 28-01-1998. This amounted to a victory for the BJP.

Rupani also described how when Shankar Singh Waghela became the chief minister and subsequently fought a bye-election, he had brazenly violated the code of conduct. However, this time despite there being a BJP government in the state and the chief minister himself fighting the election in Rajkot, both the BJP as well as the chief minister were committed to staying within

> the *maryada* (limits) set by the code of conduct and observe all its rules very strictly while conducting their election campaign….

Smear Campaign of 2002 Foreshadows Current Tactics

In addition to using government machinery to put obstructions in Modi's campaign, the Congress Party also launched a no-holds barred sleaze and slander campaign against Modi. This was in brazen violation of the code of conduct mandated by the Election Commission. But, Modi got no help from the State Election Commission nor the Rajkot police.

To quote Rupani, "They dragged in his child marriage accusing him of abandoning his wife, tried linking his name with whoever they could." Anandiben Patel's daughter told me during the course of an interview that despite being an elder of the Sangh Parivar who had known her mother for decades, Keshubhai did not hesitate to smear Anandiben's name by linking it with Modi. Anandiben is ten years senior to Modi and is a grandmother.

In fact, the anti-Modi faction in the BJP managed to manipulate the jealousy and resentment of Anandiben's husband Mafat Lal with her political success to level the most libellious charges against his own wife by alleging that she had risen high in politics because of her "close" relations with Modi. The charge was absurd because Modi had been CM only for four months and had returned to Gujarat after six years. Anandiben was not a novice brought into politics by Modi. She had already been a minister in Keshubhai's cabinet. But it didn't deter Modi's opponents from casting sleazy aspersions on Modi using Anandiben's name.

For instance, on February 16, 2002, there was a front page headline in *Sanjh Samachar* saying that the police put up barricades (*nakabandi*) following a secret report that a truck load of pamphlets levelling defamatory personal attacks against Modi had been dispatched from Ahmedabad to Rajkot. But the literature was not caught:

> Huge quantities of literature with *dushprachar* (evil propaganda) have been brought out… Very few days are left for the Rajkot Assembly bye-election. At such a time the appearance of huge quantities of scandalous literature indulging in venomous propaganda against the chief minister through levelling scurrilous attacks on his personal life in brazen violation of the code of conduct laid by the Election Commission had seriously upset BJP circles… Suddenly, in every street, pamphlets carrying defamatory and venomous

> attacks against Narendrabhai were being sold. This had created consternation in the BJP camp. ...On getting this information, the police set up a picket at Kawada Road. But it went deep into thought (*soch mein doob gayi)* since no vehicle passed that way.

These trucks seemed to have vanished into thin air but not without offloading all the defamatory literature in Rajkot because the same evening all of it was being distributed at every street corner in Rajkot. This too indicated police complicity.The report goes on to say that the circulation of a relatively unknown paper called *Bindu Patrika* published from Ahmedabad had suddenly skyrocketed because it published highly calumnious material against Modi.

> The special increase in the circulation of *Bindu* was attributed to the bizarre collation of news clips, pictures and clips of information published in various newspapers. As per information received, lakhs of copies of this daily paper from Ahmadabad have been circulated all over the city [Rajkot]…..…After the Congress Party's press conference on February 16, photocopies of another pamphlet regarding the personal life of the chief minister were sent to various offices in Rajkot.

On receiving complaints from the BJP, the police made a pretence of ordering an investigation into the publication of a defamatory advertisement in various Gujarati papers with the caption, "*Pratham Shreni ki Jamaat*." But since that was only a pretence, nothing really came of it. On February 17, 2002, the *Sanjh Times* wrote:

> Even while the tension over the distribution of scurrilous material published in a daily newspaper had not calmed down, the distribution of multi-coloured pamphlets against the State and Central government in different parts of the city created a big stir…As the campaign for the Rajkot bye- election reaches a crescendo, a BJP worker clashed with Congress workers distributing anti-Modi defamatory literature. As the police tried to take these Congress workers in its mobile van, Congress Party workers Umesh Rajguru, Kashyap Shukla, and several others rushed to the chowk…that heated up the atmosphere still further …
>
> Congress workers climbed on to the bonnet of the police jeep. But the police did not indulge in lathi charge. Instead it dealt with these Congress workers

> with gentleness. … It is noteworthy that the former presidents of the Congress Party were personally distributing these pamphlets in the Race Course area. There were three-four different kinds of pamphlets being distributed by the Congress Party, including one addressed to the Patel community in the name of the Panchayat Vice President Lalitbhai Kagthara and Vajubhai Boda.…BJP tried to put pressure on the police to stop the circulation of these pamphlets but police declined to do so saying that they did not contain the name of the printer or publisher and that the pamphlet was simply a cut and paste of old reports, news clippings and cuttings. These pamphlets continued being distributed till late in the evening.

Police Complicity with Congress

These colour booklets were described in *Sanjh Times* reports as *vikrit tareeke se chhapi* (published with a perverse mind set). The newspaper reports clearly show that the police was acting in a partisan manner by going soft on the Congress Party workers creating havoc for the BJP candidate. This gives an idea of the state of policing in Gujarat when Modi took charge and the partisan conduct of the police in favour of the Congress Party.

On February 17, *Jaihind,* another local daily of Rajkot, reported that Congress workers had been boiling in rage because Rajkot police commissioner had passed an order restricting the distribution of denigratory and obscene pamphlets against Narendra Modi. This, despite the fact that the order had been passed in the penultimate phase of the election, by which time the objectionable literature had been widely distributed.

On February 18, *Jaihind* reported that a few hours before the conclusion of the election campaign, Congress workers clashed with the police because a large mob of them insisted on rushing into the Rajkot police commissioner's office to protest against an order banning the distribution of literature targeting Modi. Their behaviour was so rowdy right inside police commissioner's compound that the police had to lathi-charge the mob. However, the news report also says that the lathi charge was mild, meant more to protect the police commissioner's office rather than control lawless actions of Congress workers.

On February 18, the *Sanjh Times* reported that BJP's demand for the arrest of the publisher of *Bindu* magazine which had published defamatory material against Prime Minister Vajpayee and the Chief

Minister Narendra Modi was dismissed by the Chief Magistrate Shri Dave because the IPC sections under which the police filed the case do not allow for punishment. Therefore, arrest warrants could not be served.

This too indicates that the Rajkot police was deliberately going soft on all those indulging in a perverse campaign against Modi and even Prime Minister Vajpayee. The police did pretend to order an investigation since BJP leaders kept knocking at their doors. But as Vijaybhai Rupani says they did nothing to stop those smearing Modi's name through baseless allegations, even though the law of the land and the election code of conduct merited strict action.

On February 19, 2002 just four days before the election date, the *Sanjh Times* had the following headlines: "Two arrested while distributing a controversial pamphlet and other material indulging in personal attacks. Police raided several places. Those distributing the material escaped from some places." It adds:

> Keeping in view the impending elections, after the Police Commissioner Upendra Singh issued a *farman* (order) last night, two separate complaints were registered with the Malviya Nagar police. Two persons connected with violating this *farman* were held by the police for selling the controversial newspapers and the colour printed pamphlet near Saurashtra High School.

Even this pretence of action by the police was only taken against a handful of those selling the pamphlets namely lower level functionaries. No action was taken against those who had written or published the pamphlets and those really behind its distribution.

The Congress Party had also succeeded in instigating government employees against Narendra Modi who was trying to streamline administration, curb wasteful expenditure, combat corruption and gear up administrative machinery to deliver good governance. On February 19, 2002 the newspaper *Jaihind* reported as follows:

> Government employees have declared that they will vote against the BJP because they are really tired of various measures of harassment initiated by the Gujarat government. These include a moratorium on filling 35,000 back-log vacancies, 20 per cent cut in Dearness Allowance, new transfer policy whereby any government employee can be sent to any post. The Congress government had introduced a policy of giving bonus to government employees. But the

new BJP government has stopped this tradition. The families of government employees are in dire distress because they did not get the Diwali bonus. On the other hand, the government is spending crores of rupees in Lok Kalyan Melas (People's Welfare Fairs) in order to win votes. Due to these misdoings both the government as well as semi-government employees of zila panchayat schools and colleges as well as of municipal corporations are very angry.

The chief minister will have to face the wrath of employees who carry thousands of votes.

Using Sleaze & Instigating Communal Polarisation

Even though defamatory and salacious material against Modi were circulated by well-known Congressmen from the very day his nomination from Rajkot was announced, yet it was only in mid-February that the police commissioner put a ban on circulation of material that violated the code of conduct established by Election Commission. But, on the ground the police did precious little to curb slanderous material. Narendra Modi could have used his executive powers as the chief minister to impose a ban but he did not do so. Instead, the BJP unit in Rajkot was instructed to follow due process in handling the issue. So they kept appealing to the relevant authorities for legal action against wrongdoers.

As reported by *Jaihind* on February 19, 2002, The Congress Party was brazen enough to challenge in Court the belated order of the police commissioner restraining the circulation of obscene literature as a "restriction on their freedom of speech." The Government lawyer argued that the order of the police commissioner does not put any restrictions on healthy campaigning, and that the order only restricted circulation and publication of false defamatory material. On February 19 *Jaihind* again named senior Congressmen involved in printing yet another anti Modi pamphlet:

A pamphlet entitled, *Natumama,* lampooning the character of Narendra Modi written by the former speaker of the Gujarat State Assembly Harish Chandra Patel, has now become notorious. It has created a big stir in Rajkot. This is the third such pamphlet after the first one distributed by the *Bindu* weekly and the second one by Yatin Ojha. A Congress worker named Mahendra Shah was distributing this pamphlet when he was nabbed by the police… After this, a gang of Congress workers proceeded towards the police commissioner's office and tried to force entry.

The report goes on to mention the names of several other Congress persons who were distributing this pamphlet in violation of police commissioner's orders but only a couple of them were booked by the police. On the same day, another news report says, "Alleging that the police is dancing to the tunes of the chief minister, the Congress has demanded the transfer of several police officers." It adds that a petition was handed over to the Chief Election Commissioner Mr. Lyngdoh, by former Chief Minister Shankar Singh Waghela and several Congress leaders including Narhari Ameen. These leaders threatened that if the named police officers were not transferred, they would go on hunger strike.

On February 21, 2002, it again reported that Congress leader Narhari Amin has demanded transfer of the police commissioner for trying to restrict circulation of its defamatory literature. The rage of the Congress Party at the token actions of the police to stop the circulation of vile literature in violation of the election code showed how habituated they were to misusing the police for partisan ends.

As the statements and public speeches of Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders quoted above clearly shows, there was not a trace of communal poison or anti-Muslim sentiment in them. If anything, Muslims had deserted the Congress Party in large numbers because both the BJP as a party, and Narendra Modi as chief minister, had concretely demonstrated their sensitivity towards the community's special needs as well as the commitment to inclusive politics. And yet, the Congress created such a vicious atmosphere that there were serious apprehensions of outbreak of communal riots to polarise votes on religious lines. For example:

When the election campaign was at its peak the banner heading of *Jaihind* on February 19, 2002 read as follows: "Rajkot under the grip of election fever, fear of communal riots." The report goes on to say: "Only three days are left before the bye-election and the city is in the grip of election fever. All the state-level BJP leaders have descended on Rajkot. The administration is under severe pressure from both sides. Today there is the last public rally of the BJP and tomorrow the Congress rally will be addressed by film star Sunil Dutt. In the coming days, incidents of arson may be reported from any number of areas in the city."

Why Modi Became the *Bête Noire* of Congress

Despite the do-or-die efforts and venal campaign launched against him by his enemies in the Congress and within sections of the RSS and the BJP,

Modi won his first election by a comfortable margin. That only added to his difficulties because their desperation took dangerous forms.

Even in his first election, the Party used mainly sleaze and defamation as its weapon against Modi. While his speeches focused on his development agenda and giving an account of constructive initiatives he had launched in the 19-odd weeks he had been in power, the Congress campaign centred around Modi's persona and throwing muck at him instead of any constructive criticism . The loss of Muslim vote bank made the Congress neurotic and they began using the most incendiary means to destroy Modi.

Today, to put down Modi, Congressmen don't tire of praising Atal Bihari Vajpayee as a moderate consensus builder. But while Vajpayee was prime minister he was targeted with as much ruthlessness as Modi—only that it cut less ice with the media or the people at large because Vajpayee was a well known national figure. By contrast, Modi was a relatively obscure regional leader for most Indians, as well as for most media professionals. Therefore, to project him as the rabid, monstrous face of Hindutva became relatively easy, thanks to the willing co-operation lent by celebrities in the national media. For example, during the same period while Vajpayee was campaigning for the UP elections, on February 19, 2002, *Jaihind* reported as follows on how Vajpayee had to deal with anti-BJP propaganda among the Muslims in other states:

> While Atal Bihari Vajpayee was campaigning in Varanasi, he was constrained to say, "even if the Muslims don't vote for the BJP, it will still be victorious." He also alleged that after the elections to the four state assemblies are over, the opposition will try to bring down his government. While addressing a public meeting in Uttar Pradesh, he compared this trait of the opposition to that of a cat which eagerly awaits for the butter filled *matki* to somehow break. He said they would not let this expectation to be realised. "There are some people who are telling the Muslims not to vote for the BJP whereas the truth is that the BJP has never worked against any minority, including the Muslims."
>
> Speaking about the Muslims, he said the BJP cannot be accused of being anti-Muslim. The BJP-led Central government as well as BJP governments in various states give equal treatment to Muslims. Therefore, Muslims have no cause to go against the BJP. Despite this, if the Muslims don't vote for us, the BJP is still sure of victory.

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the supposedly liberal Vajpayee, who in hindsight is presented by Congress and the Left as the more acceptable and inclusive face of BJP, the so-called poster boy of aggressive Hindutva never for a moment ruled out Muslim support. He not only established good rapport with Muslims of his constituency and elsewhere in Gujarat, especially Kutch but actually got solid electoral support from almost every section of the Muslim community for his very first election. As quoted in the previous chapter, election booths with over 70 per cent Muslim majority population gave a big lead to BJP and helped in Modi's victory. This is what singled him out as the most serious and potent threat for the Congress Party. Modi had succeeded where even Vajpayee had failed!

Parallels Between 2002 and 2014 PM Election

The malicious attempts at character assassination which started way back in 2001, hasn't stopped till date. Today, even respected social scientists and researchers claiming to write research-based treaties on Modi have kept this industry alive. One of the latest in this extremely lucrative industry is Nilanjan Mukhopadhyaya's trivia tract named, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times*[1]. His is the latest valiant attempt to dig out some dirt and link Modi's name to some sex scandal or the other. But the poor man could not get anything beyond whispers and rumours shared with him by professional Modi baiters in Gujarat. But they too chose to remain anonymous. He tried his best to get Modi's supposedly "abandoned wife" Jasodaben to provide him some juicy material. But like all others, he failed miserably. So he relies on wily insinuations linking Modi with his much older colleague and current revenue minister, Anandiben Patel. Such insinuations have led nowhere and yet are resurrected before every election. For the 2014 parliamentary elections, Congress Party has tried to add a criminal touch to this character assassination by using Pradeep Sharma, a suspended IAS officer charged with serious criminal offences, to make wild allegations about his possessing an obscene video with Modi and a young woman architect[2]. No such video has been produced

1 Nilanjan Mukhopadhyaya, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times* (Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2013).

2 For details of Pradeep Sharma's case, see: Madhu P. Kishwar, "*Ulta Chor Kotwal Ko Daante*: Indicted IAS Officer, Pradeep Sharma's Counter Offensive against Narendra Modi," December 3, 2013, *Web*. http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1738#.Uv3tQUKSxJP.

as evidence but Sharma, with the open connivance of Congress leaders, prominent journalists, TV anchors, and many other worthies from NGOs and media have pilloried Modi for months using this flimsy case. The Congress Party also helped Sharma file a case in the Supreme Court alleging he is being hounded because he has an obscene video of Modi. The Home Ministry has set up an inquiry into the matter knowing full well that nothing will come out of it. It is simply meant to keep the issue alive till the parliamentary election of 2014. As in 2002, so also now, Modi hasn't condescended to issue a rejoinder or clarification.

During the course of one of my interviews, when I asked Modi how he coped with all these vile attacks, he said:

> This well-orchestrated campaign shows their desperation. If a person has big flaws, it is easy to catch and portray them. But, if you cannot find any big flaws then people go for making allegations for which no proof is required - call the person arrogant, or allege some sex scandal. There is no way I can refute such charges. My philosophy is to use the stones hurled at me to make a bridge for myself; I believe in proving my critics wrong through my work. I keep saying, the more muck you throw at me, the brighter will the BJP lotus bloom. That is the nature of the lotus, it rises out of *keechhad* (slush) to create exquisite beauty.

CHAPTER 10

Aiming for Nirmal Gujarat & "We Can Do It" Spirit

Pre-Godhra Speeches of Modi

It is our endeavour to remove all kinds of divides—those between the high and low, touchables and untouchables—as well as other aspects of discrimination which have filled people's hearts with conflicts and divided the entire humanity into fragments…Rishi Valmiki taught us that in order to make progress in society, you have to take along Shabari with you; if you want your society to progress, you have to ensure that even vanars stand by you. If you want to move ahead, you have to embrace Kevat. …We have come together at this place to express our commitment to follow his message.
Narendra Modi on December 1, 2001

I have come to pray to the sants that their blessings may generate the creative energy that enables the 5 crore Gujaratis and 100 crore fellow Indians to acquire so much self-confidence that our society is rid of negativity and guilt.
Narendra Modi on January 1, 2002

Even while undertaking major new initiatives and spending enormous amounts of time on earthquake rehabilitation, within the first few weeks of his assuming power, Narendra Modi addressed meetings of scores of citizens' groups, especially the poor and the marginalised. What he spoke to them about and the programmes of action he announced, carry the stamp of his inclusive politics of *samrasta* (social harmony through mutual love and respect), which gives primacy to addressing the problems of the most disadvantaged.

I am reproducing my English translations of two of his speeches as illustrative examples. Both these speeches are addressed to a Hindu audience—the first one on December 1, 2001, at the occasion of Valmiki Jayanti and the second one on January 1, 2002, at the centenary celebrations

of Swaminarayan sect. As with the earlier speeches I have quoted from, there is not a hint of divisive communal rhetoric in either these two or several other of Modi's speeches of pre-Godhra period that I heard through video recordings. I invite the readers to judge for themselves whether Modi really sounds like a man itching to engineer riots in order to consolidate the Hindu vote bank, as alleged by Congress Party's spin doctors.

At Valmiki Jayanti, December 1, 2001

Maharishi Valmiki, also revered as *Adikavi* or the First Poet, is the author of *Ramayana,* one of the foremost epics of India. The speech given below was delivered by Modi to celebrate the legacy of Maharishi Valmiki:

> Sharad Purnima arrives when the moon blossoms with 16 *kalas* (qualities that make for perfection in divinity). Similarly, Valmiki Jayanti represents the glow of 16 *kalas* resplendent with *gyan* (knowledge) that we have received as a cultural legacy from Rishi Valmiki[1]. They inspire even the present generation. There are many popular myths and stories associated with Rishi Valmiki that are alive through oral tradition. We have no authoritative basis to say what kind of life Rishi Valmiki lived. But due to his visionary writing, the life of Prabhu Ram ji has provided limitless inspiration for thousands of years. Whenever one's mind is disturbed and one wants to find an anchor in life, when one wants to know what ought to be the inter-relation between one human being and another, between individuals and society, between *nar* (humans) and *vanar* (animals), between *nar* (humans) and *Narayan* (the Divine), what kind of social organisation we need, Rishivar has given us the best possible literature on these issues. The auspicious occasion of his birth anniversary is the appropriate time to repay our debt to Rishi Valmiki, to bow before him and live life according to the inspiration provided by him.
>
> On this occasion, I join you in offering my *naman* (paying my respect) to Rishivar Valmiki and follow the path of establishing samrasta. The government

1 Valmiki was born a Brahmin but raised by a sweeper woman. He became a highway dacoit to raise his family, until he had an encounter with sage Narada. By the repetition of *Ramanama* or the name of Ram, he attained the supreme state of a 'maharishi'. Since a 'valmika' or an anthill had grown over his body during his long period of austerities and state of *tapasya*, he came to be known as Valmiki. The caste and communities that have come in recent centuries to be condemned to the job of cleaning human waste and hence treated as untouchable, claim their ancestry from Sage Valmiki.

of Gujarat is committed to paying attention to the problems of each and every community of Gujarat, especially those living in rural areas, as per the path shown to us by Rishi Valmiki.

Rishi Valmiki laid central focus on awakening the power of truth in order to destroy evil. He did not desire or envisage the slaying of demonic forces merely through the force of war. He has presented a whole vision of a well-organised society in order to defeat *asuri* (demonic) powers. Prabhu Ramchandra was competent to handle his adversary [Ravan] by himself. But Rishi Valmiki inspired him to mobilise and carry along the power of the entire range of *vanjeevan* (forest life) including *vanars* (monkeys), to ignite divine energy in them for the purpose of destroying subversive forces in society that appear in the form of *asuras* (demons). This social mobilisation of the good included not just Ravan's own brother and son, but his whole family. Rishi Valmiki has taught us to live by energising and bringing together positive energies of society in order to destroy *asuri shakti*.

He taught us that in order to make progress in society, you have to take along Shabari[2] with you; if you want your society to progress, you have to ensure that even *vanars* stand by you. If you want to move ahead, you have to embrace Kevat[3]. Rishi Valmiki gave all these messages. We have come together at this place to express our commitment to follow his message.

When I was student of social sciences, I had read that there were people in this country who forced our Valmiki brothers to tie a broom to their waist when passing through their neighbourhood or street so as to avoid leaving

2 Shabari, a humble forest dweller, is counted among the foremost devotees of Lord Rama in the epic *Ramayana*. During his exile, while searching for Sita, Ram chances upon Shabari's hut. Out of her love for Rama, she wants to make sure that he only gets the sweetest wild fruits that she had gathered from the forest. Therefore, she tastes them before offering it to him. Seeing how lost she is in her devotion, Ram partakes them lovingly. Shabari has come to symbolise pure love and devotion, which humbles God himself. She also represents traditional forest dwelling communities of India, some of whom were designated as 'tribal' by the British. This misleading nomenclature has stayed intact even in post-Independent India. Modi is invoking her as a symbol of marginalised communities whose development his government promises to prioritise.

3 In the epic *Ramayana*, Kevat refers to a humble community of boat rowers. This particular incident refers to a boatman, named Guha, who ferried Ram, Sita and Lakshman across a river during their years of exile. Kevat achieved *moksha* - that is, liberation from the cycle of life and death, at the hands of Ram due to his selfless devotion to him. This community began to be counted among the most backward castes of India on account of its economic marginalisation that began during colonial regime.

their footprints behind. These kinds of cruelties have been inflicted both on your and my ancestors. We are just attempting to wash away those sins. Friends, when we care about the problems of the marginalised sections of our society, it is not part of party politics (*rajkaran*) but is a part of *samajikaran* (strengthening society).

Genuine governance involves winning over the hearts of the poor, the wretched. One has to wipe this sin through one's sweat and blood. It is only when we wash these sins that we become worthy of winning over the hearts of people.

It is our endeavour to remove all kinds of divides—those between the high and low, touchables and untouchables—as well as other aspects of discrimination which have filled people's hearts with conflicts and divided the entire humanity into fragments. This creates enormous hurdles in the progress of India. If we want to remove these obstacles, we have to engage seriously with *samajikaran*.

It is incorrect to say that *savarnas* (certain upper castes) alone commit atrocities on us. In our society, we have numerous horizontal divides as well. At one time, we used to read in newspapers that Dalits are all one homogenous community. But, if someone were to ask a Valmiki regarding his social status after 50 years of independence, what kind of answer are we likely to get?

When I invited a Dalit girl to place a Kumbh at my residence on the occasion of 'Vijay Dashami', it is not because someone asked me to do so. It is because I believe it is the collective responsibility of all of us to change this mindset. This disease is so deep rooted in our society that the mindset of even those who are well-educated, smart, and converse in English has not really changed on this issue.

We have decided to construct 100,000 houses for our brothers of the Valmiki *samaj*, who have thus far spent their lives in *jhopadis* (hutments). In addition, to changing social attitudes towards health issues, under the Nirmal Gujarat programme, we are constructing 10,000 public toilets in urban areas as part of our endeavour to provide all possible facilities to those who have lived in *jhopadis* thus far.

This decision to construct 10,000 toilets was taken today itself on sage Valmiki's birthday. We will set up a Safai Karamchari Corporation for the benefit of those whose ancestors have made vital contribution towards keeping Gujarat clean. Taking inspiration from those who have worked hard for centuries for maintaining cleanliness in society, we raise the flag of *Nirmal Gujarat* (Clean Gujarat).

This government wants to transform Gujarat into a *Nandanvan* (the

> legendary idyllic forest associated with Lord Krishna) with the initiative and hard work of five crore Gujaratis. This government wants to awaken the creative imagination of five crore Gujaratis to keep the flag of Gujarat flying high. I am giving a call to all of you to make Nirmal Gujarat a reality…
>
> Our ancestors have been in the forefront in their role as health service providers. They have also been icons of *sahan shakti* (forbearance) besides playing a key role in literary creativity. Bowing my head before such a community, I have come to take your blessings that I may fulfill the responsibilities you have all assigned to me, I express my deepest gratitude to all of you. Please raise your right hand to join me in this slogan. I will say '*Apna Gujarat*'; you say, '*Anokha Gujarat*' (Our Gujarat, Incredible Gujarat).

The following things stand out in this speech:

- Though he identifies closely with the historic injustices suffered by the untouchable sweeper community that he is addressing , especially since Modi himself comes from one of the most impoverished "backward" castes, he does not instigate anti-upper caste sentiment among his audiences. Unlike most other lower caste leaders, there is no trace of bitterness or hostility against upper castes in Modi's speech. This despite the fact that the powerful Patel lobby and certain other upper castes of Gujarat viewed Modi with a great deal of hostility when he became chief minister. Instead he emphasises that redressing these historic injustices has to be treated as the collective responsibility of the entire society with government playing an active role.
- Instead of playing on the inferiority complex thrust on the Valmiki community on account of the "lowly" job of scavenging they have been associated with, Modi gives it a positive spin to make them feel proud of their vital contribution to society.

"We Can Do It" Speech on January 1, 2002

A similar compassionate, samras, and constructive worldview is evident in the speech delivered on January 1, 2002, at the Swaminarayan sect's centenary celebrations in Rajkot. Here are key extracts from that speech:

> I am familiar with the traditions of this institution… If we examine the millennia-old *gurukul* tradition, we will find that most of those who became immortal [through their great actions] in history received their *sanskars* from the *gurukul* system. This tradition had so much *samarthya* (capability) because

it did not just provide book knowledge, livelihood skills or merely train people to acquire degrees. This tradition taught human beings to become humane. This institution cultivates in men the capability to rise from being mere men to becoming divine (*nar se narayan*).

This institution has cultivated an atmosphere that inculcates the *sanskar* of rising above *aham* (self-hood) towards *vyam* (ourness), whereby people are transformed from being self-centred to being inherently society oriented, and inculcate *sanskars* (values) of collectivity to widen people's perspective towards life.

This great tradition teaches students to honour their *gurus*; it cultivates *shraddha* towards *sanskriti* (culture) and the desire to dedicate one's life to doing good, whereby there is constant inspiration to sacrifice all one has for achieving excellence. This institution carries out a *nirantar* (never ending) *yagya* for crafting such a lifestyle. By giving primacy to the *gurukul* system in Swaminarayan tradition, the light that has appeared in the land of Rajkot has lit up the lives of not just the specially gifted students of Swaminarayan but also created a new wave of awareness in all of Gujarat. For lighting this lamp of social reconstruction, the entire people of Gujarat are indebted to this institution.

It is the special genius of Hindu society that it has the capability to respond to the needs of changing times and varied circumstances to set into motion the required changes. There was a time when those who were rooted in this *sanskriti* (culture) lived by this mantra. We converted the entire world into *aryas*. The word *arya* doesn't imply religious conversion. It means becoming *susanskrit* (someone rooted in good cultural moral values). We gave good values to the whole world. Times changed when we faced invaders. To protect and defend itself from invasions became the biggest responsibility of society. At that time, the *sants* of this land decided that we would not cross the seas; we would endeavour to protect whatever we can within our land.

Times changed again after independence. With that change—be it through the inspiration of Swami Vivekanand, the Swaminarayan tradition, the Hare Rama-Hare Krishna movement or numerous other great men of this land—people from diverse regions of India travelled all over the world to spread spiritual awareness. They took this task on as a *yagna* to garner the collective inner strength of society. As a result, the entire world was compelled to look towards India. This *gurukul* system nurtures a tradition that has the power to remove differences between the East and the West. It attempts to imbue the strengths of the West with *sanskars* and endeavours to understand the West,

with the aim of bringing about the necessary changes in the East and to build a world where there is no clash of civilizations and where there is no hostility due to differences of ideology.

We need a new movement in our land to promote collective thinking, whereby the best aspects of the two civilizations can be deployed for the benefit of humanity. We need a new thought movement in our land to give our society a new direction

Undoubtedly, v*ysan mukti* (freedom from harmful addictions) is essential, and strength of character is necessary. In the last 50 years, we have tried to instil that in some measure among the 100 crores Indians. But, our endeavours have somehow fallen short in many ways. Due to 1000 years of slavery, we have developed a mindset that we are inferior. Those who ruled over us have consistently carried out ideological assaults to remind us that we are useless as people—that we have nothing worthwhile of our own. This sense of inferiority and guilt has poisoned the social atmosphere and eroded our strengths. It is very important that we recreate a sense of self-confidence in our country. This sea of humanity has been living under the weight of guilt due to 1000 years of slavery amidst an environment of negativity. It lacks sufficient awareness of its own goodness.

We need to create awareness that this country of 100 crores, immersed in the quagmire of pessimism and weighed down by guilt, is actually a very worthy society. It has the ability to offer a lot of excellence to the world. This land has the potential to do good to the entire world. Our ancestors had this faith. How do we re-create that faith again? What kind of educational institutions should we create? What kind of curriculum and syllabus should we follow? How does our entire education system bring about such awareness in the social environment that inculcates *nachiketa bhav* (lack of attachment to material gain and inclination towards spiritual development) among our people to help develop the 'we can do it', 'we will do it' spirit and self-confidence in our own society? This is a matter of grave concern today.

I feel that after independence, our society became rudderless. We could win freedom because at that time people felt that even if they have to sacrifice their all, they would not rest until they succeeded in winning independence for India. But after independence, our leaders could not provide us a direction nor explained why we fought for freedom. As a result, the sense of duty towards society began to get eroded. The sense of 'rights' became strong while the sense of duty began to disappear. Wherever you look, one finds the same attitude: "What am I going to get out of it? What is mine? What is there in it for me?"

This ' sense of rights' (*adhikar bhav*) is making us indifferent towards 'sense of duty' (*kartavya bhav)*. Any society where the sense of duty is destroyed and the sense of rights alone triumphs hurtles towards a dark future. Who is going to take on the role of social reconstruction? It is not possible for politicians to undertake this task. The *sants* of our *rashtra* (country), the *gurukul* tradition of our *rashtra*, the *acharyas* of our *rashtra* have to nurture a new generation, which combines self-confidence with a sense of duty. If we cultivate these two qualities, the strength emanating from them will shape the future history of our society….

[Modi then talks about India having joined the select few (ten) countries with capability for making a nuclear bomb and yet, Indians feeling that they have achieved nothing.]

We have acquired so much strength and yet we complain of having achieved nothing… America is such a powerful nation; it has such an effective intelligence system and yet terrorists came and blew up the Pentagon as well as the Twin Towers—the heart of the American economic empire. The US could not save these two mighty power centres. By contrast, the *jawans* of India took death in their fists and sacrificed their very lives to protect the Indian Parliament, to protect Indian democracy.

It is unfortunate that even after such mighty sacrifices, this country of 100 crores forgets the self-effacing spirit of those courageous men and keeps singing songs of failure. This is all due to the habit of living under guilt and mindset of negativity. During the Kutch earthquake, there was hardly any region of this country that did not reach out to help the victims within hours. A society trapped in the jaws of death rose up within a week to say 'whatever was willed by God has happened'…

Today, if you go and see the earthquake-affected areas, you will find numerous temples of human endeavour (*purusharth*). I have known officials who went out to save someone else's child at a time when their own wife was dead. There were officials who were performing their duty towards society leaving behind the funerals of their own parents.

Is this not a sign of the inner resilience of our society? But, who is looking at this strength? Just a while ago, I inaugurated a new 156-megawatt power plant, which was readied within 300 days. Look at the skills required to do that!

I have come to pray to the *sants* that their blessings may generate the creative energy that enables the 5 crore Gujaratis and 100 crore fellow Indians to acquire so much self-confidence that our society is rid of negativity and guilt. We Indians have our own limitations and flaws. Nevertheless, we can

collectively work to remove them.

Please help us in creating such an environment. There is no better way to serve our country. In order to awaken this sense of duty among our people, Mahatma Gandhi had once written a letter to someone, about which I feel like talking about in this forum…

At this point, the video recording of Modi's speech breaks. However, the above extracts give us a good glimpse into his mindset. Even while talking to specific Hindu religious sects, Modi does not make any sectional or divisive appeal. In both these, as in all other speeches, Modi talks of all the 5 crore (now 6 crore) people of Gujarat and 100 crore Indians, that obviously includes Hindus, Muslims, Christians et al. He focuses on harnessing the creative energy of all sections of society for the common good of all.

Even when talking of the 1000-year history of invasions that India suffered, Modi does not use them to promote anti-Muslim or anti Christian feelings. In fact, he doesn't even mention the religions of the invaders. His primary focus is on the defeatist mindset of most educated Indians and the sense of "negativity" and erosion of self-esteem that has come to characterise India of today.

This is actually aimed at the RSS and its allied outfits more than the Congress and the Left. It is well known that many among the votaries of Hindutva are the most inflicted with "negativity" and "sense of collective guilt" on account of these foreign invasions. It is they who stay traumatised by the question: What is lacking in Hindu society that enabled small bands of foreign invaders to repeatedly defeat local rulers and assume power over such a large population and country? The RSS and other Hindutva votaries are the ones who have tried to din into our heads that Hindus were subjugated because they were militarily inferior and socially "divided" on account of social diversity unlike the culturally homogeneous and therefore politically "united" nations of Europe. Modi is also talking about the inferiority complex most Indians, including the Leftists, have vis-a-vis the West which makes the educated elite blindly emulate the ways of the West– be it in politics, scholarship culture or social norms. But, Modi is not indulging in jingoistic nationalism and promoting anti-West phobia. Instead, he proposes a creative partnership and elimination of conflict between the East and the West by each

imbibing the best the other has to offer.

The tone and tenor of these two speeches pervades every single speech that Modi delivered during the entire pre-Godhra period and continued even after he became the target of a demonisation campaign. It defies comprehension how a person who talks the language of samrasta and 'ourness' to build a new India infused with positive energy can be accused of being "divisive" leave alone itching to see bloodshed in Gujarat. It is worth asking how and why the myth of Modi being a divisive and murderous politician was manufactured considering all his actions upheld the ideal of *Sarva dharma sambhav*—treating all religions with respect even while being deeply rooted in one's own.

CHAPTER 11

The Godhra Train Massacre
Accident or Conspiracy?

If every time there is an inter-communal conflict, the majority is blamed regardless of the merits of the question… the springs of traditional tolerance will dry up.
K.M. Munshi, Freedom fighter and Congress leader, to Jawahar Lal Nehru

...no evidence to show that the chief minister and/or any other minister(s) in his Council of ministers or police officers had played any role in the Godhra incident or that there was any lapse on their part in the matter of providing protection, relief...to the victims of communal riots or in the matter of not complying with the recommendations and directions given by National Human Rights Commission.
Justice Nanavati Commission Report, September 2008

The amazing distortions introduced by Congress and its leftist allies into the Godhra massacre which led to the roasting alive, on February 27, 2002, of 59 women, children, and men travelling on the Sabarmati Express point to their having a clear vested interest in that gruesome tragedy.

The incident has deliberately been made controversial despite an exhaustive report by an Inquiry Commission, headed by retired Supreme Court judge, Justice G.T. Nanavati, appointed within days of the incident.

On the one hand are those who agree with the Commission's findings that the attack on Sabarmati Express was the result of a well-planned conspiracy by vested interests to destabilise the BJP government in the state. This report has established that a group of Kashmiri terrorists of Jammu & Kashmir in collaboration with Pakistan's ISI and some Muslim fundamentalists of Godhra hatched and executed this conspiracy in order to push the country into a communal cauldron. As documented by the

Nanavati Commission[1], some of the leading accused and convicted turned out to be Congressmen of Godhra.

On the other hand, the version made internationally popular by the Congress Party, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, their allied NGOs, and media is that the Godhra incident was either an accident or engineered by the BJP in general, and chief minister Narendra Modi in particular, to trigger communal riots in the state with a view to polarise Gujarat on religious lines. In order to understand the nature of the Godhra massacre and the post-Godhra riots of 2002, we need to familiarise ourselves with the social and political temper of Gujarat inherited by Narendra Modi and the communally-charged history of Godhra.

As pointed out by Zafar Sareshwala and others in chapter two, under decades of Congress rule, Gujarat had witnessed hundreds of communal riots and also major caste riots. The BJP governments that came to power in the 1990's carried forward the same tradition of engineering divides rather than working to bridge them. Modi thus inherited a highly polarised society and polity. Towns and cities, which were witness to repeated riots, were like a tinderbox even though rural areas, especially Saurashtra and Kutch, did not allow riots or communal polarisation of the kind prevailing in Ahmedabad or Surat.

Troubled History of Godhra

Godhra town in Panchmahal district may not have been a familiar name for people outside Gujarat, but within the state it had a long and troubled history of communal violence and strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. A large proportion of Gujarati Hindus here is of Sindhi origin; they migrated to Godhra at the time of the partition. Even the Inquiry Commission, headed by Justice Nanavati, appointed to investigate Godhra riots begins its report with the following observation:

> Godhra town is a very sensitive place. There is a high percentage of Muslim population in various places in the district. Communal riots had taken place in Godhra in the years 1925, 1928, 1946, 1948, 1950, 1953, 1980, 1981, 1985,

1 Justice G.T. Nanavati and Justice Akshay H. Mehta, "Part I: Sabarmati Express Train Incident of Godhra," *Report by the Commission of Inquiry*, Ahmedabad (September 18, 2008), *Web.* http://home.gujarat.gov.in/homedepartment/downloads/godharaincident.pdf).

> 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. The communal riots that had taken place in 1948 were very serious. Initially, the Muslims had burnt 869 houses of Hindus. Thereafter, the Hindus had burnt 3,071 houses of Muslims... [2]

In the book *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*[3], journalist Jyoti Punwani, one of the foremost members of the "secular" brigade, and a close colleague of Teesta Setalvad writes:

> Stereotyping of communities is not only communal but also misleading. Keeping this in mind, some attributes for which the Ghanchis of Godhra are known among both Hindus and Muslims in Godhra and outside, may be taken as applicable to a majority of them. They are known as an aggressive, impulsive community, descendants of Afghan soldiers and Bhil women. They were initially harvesters and traders of oil and later became farmers. Today they are in the transport business. They are largely illiterate and poor, though the number of educated among them is growing. The Ghanchis have had a long history of violent conflicts with Godhra's Hindus, pre- and post-Independence.

Stereotyping communities is indeed pernicious. But stereotypes hold only if the reality lends credence to the stereotype in some measure. The Ghanchi Muslim community that is preponderant among the Muslims of Godhra was feared and mistrusted even by non-Ghanchi Muslims. Since many of them own workshops for repair of motor vehicles, a significant section is allegedly involved in dismantling stolen motor vehicles for use as spare parts. They also had a history of large-scale theft of timber from neighbouring forests. Even Bohra Muslims would earlier avoid visiting Ghanchi Muslim areas. Most police and IAS officers described it as a "difficult" posting until very recently.

Even though communal murders and attacks dating to the early decades of the 20th century are still fresh in people's memory, the following incident has become part of Hindu fear-lore in Godhra: Four Hindu teachers, including two women teachers, were hacked to death by miscreants in Saifia Madrasa in Vhorvada area of Godhra on November

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2 Justice Nanavati and Justice Mehta, "Part I: Sabarmati Express Train Incident of Godhra", pp. 12-3.

3 Jyoti Punwani, "The Carnage at Godhra," in *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, ed. Siddharth Varadarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002), p. 67.

20, 1990 in front of children. One Hindu tailor was also stabbed to death in this area. All this was done by anti-social elements allegedly at the instance of the Congress MLA of the area.

Fortunately, in the last ten years, with growing political stability and massive improvements in the economic and educational infrastructure of the area, the social and occupational profile of Godhra's Ghanchi community has changed noticeably. With stricter enforcement of law and order and new economic opportunities opening up for this once-backward community, criminal elements have been marginalised. This has begun to change both the self view and aspirations of the Ghanchi community as well as their image in the eyes of non-Ghanchis—both Hindus and Muslims. But this change could not have happened if Narendra Modi had not put in determined efforts to heal all wounds and bridge communal divides. My forthcoming book will cover outcomes of this healing process set into motion by the government which culminated in Modi's *Sadbhavna Yatra* in 2011.

Nanavati Commission to Investigate Godhra Carnage

On February 27, 2002, an over-packed Sabarmati Express carrying over 2,000 *karsevaks* from Ayodhya reached Godhra station at 7.47 a.m., nearly five hours late from its scheduled time. This train was stoned by a mob of Muslims as it pulled out of the station and stopped a few meters away at Signal Falia. Thereafter, one of the compartments was set on fire with passengers trapped inside. It led to a gruesome death for 59 women, men, and children. The incident, which was covered extensively by the media, sent shock waves all over the country. Most Gujaratis believe that the Godhra killings triggered off a horrific spiral of retaliatory violence in several parts of Gujarat.

On March 6, 2002, the government of Gujarat appointed Justice K.G. Shah to lead a one-man Commission of Inquiry into the Godhra massacre to ascertain whether it was pre-planned. Its mandate included adequacy of administrative measures taken to prevent and deal with the disturbances in Godhra and subsequent disturbances in the state and recommend suitable measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

But from day one of its appointment, the Congress Party and its allied NGOs attacked the Commission and questioned the integrity of the appointed judge. They alleged that the Godhra incident was due to government's failure or complicity, not a planned attack by Muslims. The Commission was reconstituted and made high powered by a fresh

notification of May 21, 2002. A retired judge of the Supreme Court, Justice G.T. Nanavati, headed this two-member commission.

In response to unremitting attacks by Congress and its allied NGOs, on July 20, 2004, the government widened the scope of the inquiry to also probe the role and conduct of the then chief minister, cabinet ministers, police officers, other individuals, and organisations in the Godhra massacre as well as in dealing with the post-Godhra riots.

But even the appointment of Justice Nanavati became a target of wild aspersions by Congress-supported NGOs, even though the judge had not been arbitrarily chosen by Modi. This is how Modi explained the choice of Nanavati to head the Commission:

> My idea was to bring out whatever lapses occurred either by way of decision-making or in the implementation of orders in both these cases. That would help us learn from our mistakes. Justice Nanavati is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court. I did not handpick him but I asked the Supreme Court to suggest names. They named Nanavati because he had headed the Commission of Inquiry into the 1984 riots. I personally didn't know Justice Nanavati. I took whatever name was suggested by the Supreme Court because I wanted this enquiry to be done through a proper judicial process.
>
> In fact, I even added in its terms of reference that all the charges against me should also be examined. If I wanted to escape scrutiny, why would I appoint a commission to probe charges against me? They had given a memorandum to the President against me. I handed over to the Nanavati Commission the entire list of charges they had listed in their memorandum. And yet, they went hammer and tongs at me.

During the six-year-long inquiry, the Commission examined a host of eyewitnesses, documentary evidence, and forensic reports, and also examined the facts and figures that were gathered by the investigating officers. It received applications and affidavits from 44,475 persons and another 2,019 statements and affidavits filed by government officers. All the witnesses were duly cross-examined by lawyers. Those who opposed the Gujarat government's submission that the train massacre was part of a larger conspiracy to destabilise the duly-elected government in Gujarat were allowed to cross-examine witnesses and present counter-evidence. The first part of the Nanavati Commission Report was tabled in Gujarat Assembly on September 25, 2008.

Facts Established by the Nanavati Commission:

About 2,000-2,200 *karsevaks,* under the aegis of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), boarded the train at Ayodhya from where they were returning after *Purna Ahuti Mahayagna*, organised by some Hindu organisations as part of its 'Ram Temple Nirman' programme. This movement to construct the Ram Mandir had earlier led to the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 by some from the same organisations, leading to a deep schism between the Hindus and Muslims. However, unlike the Babri Masjid demolition, *Purna Ahuti Yagya* had been a peaceful affair. People from all parts of the country went to Ayodhya, participated in the *yagya* and started heading back from mid-February onwards to the end of February 2002.

That these *karsevaks,* including VHP cadres, were not out on a riotous binge is evident from the fact that there were many women and children among the families, which went for *karseva* in Ayodhya. It is a well-established fact that men rarely carry young girls, women, and children of their family along with them when they are out to foment riots. It was also established that not all the passengers on the Sabarmati Express were VHP cadres. There were many ordinary passengers in that train, which was so packed that people were sitting on the floor and even outside the train toilets. The railway checking staff had not been able to enter the compartments to check ticketless travellers.

As the train rolled out of the station at 7.47 a.m., after the scheduled five-minute halt at Godhra, some miscreants pulled the emergency chain causing it to stop at Signal Falia, which is at a distance of about 500-700 metres from the railway station. This area is surrounded by housing colonies of Ghanchi Muslims. Even as the train was coming to a halt, a mob of about 1,500 people began stoning the train so mercilessly that people had to down the window shutters and shut the doors of this chock-a-block train. Many passengers took shelter on upper berths or crawled under the lower berths to escape being hit by stones and fireballs, which were pelted with such ferocity that many windowpanes were shattered. In addition to stones, the attacking mob threw burning rags soaked in petroleum. The train was mobbed and attacked from both sides, the reason why passengers could not rush out to save themselves from stones and fireballs.

Some among the stone-pelting mob cut open the canvas of S/6 coach, thus delinking it from the adjoining coach S/7. Through that opening the arsonists climbed on to the coach with carboys of petrol. They poured

huge quantities of inflammable liquid inside coach S/6 after forcibly opening the inter-connecting door towards coach S/7.

This led to rapid spread of flames and smoke, which trapped the passengers inside the coach and charred 59 men, women, and children to death. Many more were severely injured while trying to escape.

Circumstantial evidence, testimonies of survivors, and eye-witnesses, including the train's driver, train guard, policemen stationed at Godhra railway station, as well as vendors at the Godhra platform, the fire engine drivers, and police officers who rushed to the spot on hearing of the attack, plus confessions of some of the accused—all point to the fact that the Godhra incident was pre-planned and it was part of a bigger conspiracy in which notable Congress leaders of Godhra were named. Justice Tewatia Committee went so far as to say, "The plan was to burn the entire train with more than two thousand passengers in the wee hours of February 27, 2002. It was a terrorist action plan that partly failed. The perpetrators of the terrorist acts received support from jehadi elements operating from Godhra. These included some Congress members of the nagar palika."[4] The most prominent name mentioned in this regard is that of the then chairman of Godhra municipality, Mohammad Hussain Kalota.

Kalota headed the Congress Minority Cell at Godhra for six years, and had past links with Tablighi Jamaat and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, a Pakistan-based organisation active in Kashmir. It had also claimed responsibility via an email for the Delhi blasts on September 7, 2011. However, he was acquitted for "lack of evidence". Other accused Congressmen included Municipal Councilor Haji Bilal, Faroukh Bhana, Abdul Rehman Ghantia, Salim Abdul Ghaffar Sheikh, Ayub Patalia, Irfan Kalandar, Meboob Popa, Shankat Patadiya, and Siddique Vohra. Two others—Ibrahim Dhantiya and Salim Panwala—are alleged to have escaped to Pakistan.

The two main persons who executed this plan were Rajak Kurkur and Salim Panwala, as "part of a larger conspiracy to create terror and destabilise the administration."[5]

To execute this murderous plan, they had procured in a tempo

4 Justice D. S. Tewatia, Dr. J. C. Batra, et al., *Godhra Carnage-Justice Tewatia Report*, Council for International Affairs and Human Rights, Delhi, April 2002, pp. 35-6.

5 Justice Nanavati and Justice Mehta, "Part I: Sabarmati Express Train Incident of Godhra," p. 159.

(small delivery van used for carrying goods) seven or eight carboys of 20 litres each of petrol (over 140 litres) from the petrol station of Kalabhai at about 9.30 p.m. on February 26, 2002. They assembled at Aman Guest House in the Ghanchi Muslim area near Signal Falia, mobbed the train from both sides and stoned the coaches so heavily that the passengers could not come out. This was to ensure maximum casualties when the S/6 coach of the Sabarmati Express was set on fire.[6]

The determination of the mob to cause mass killings is evident from the account of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) B.R. Simpi (Witness-25). When he reached the site of accident from Vadodara at about 11a.m., he saw a mob of about 2,000 to 2,500 persons near Ali Masjid. He testified, that they were "shouting slogans which had the effect of hurting the religious feelings of the other community," and heard announcements like *Islam khatre me hai, Maro, kato* (Islam is in danger, let us cut them up and kill them)– coming from loud speakers of the Ali Masjid. He had to order firing in order to control this aggressive mob calling for the murder of more Hindus. This mob was demanding that the persons who had been rounded up by the police earlier should be released. Even with the police presence, they kept throwing stones on the train and the stranded passengers, shouting, "*Maar dalo, Kat dalo*." Six policemen were also injured by the stone-throwing mob. Apprehending that there would be another attack on the train and the passengers, DSP Simpi had directed Police Constable Mansing to fire one round in the air. It did not have any effect and, therefore, three more rounds were fired.[7]

Similarly, Police Sub Inspector (PSI) Gadhvi fired two rounds from his revolver. Firing in the air did not have the desired effect and, therefore, he directed his men to fire at the persons in the mob below their waist. Two from the mob were injured. When the mob coming from the other side started pelting stones, one more shot was fired, which hit one person. By that time Reserve Police Force (RPF) Commandant Pande had also arrived on the scene and ordered his men fire…

Police Inspector of CID Crime Branch, Mehbub Beg Mirza (W-19) had reached Godhra at about 11:15 a.m. from Vadodara. He was asked by DSP Simpi to make the passengers sit in the train. While he was doing so, a mob of about 2,500 to 3,000 persons had come from the Signal Falia

6 Ibid., pp. 159-60.
7 Ibid., p. 123.

side. Persons therein were shouting, "*Chhod do, mar dalo, kat dalo.*" while pelting stones. DSP Simpi and RPF Commandant first gave them warnings and then ordered firing. At this point, some among the violent mob were nabbed by the police.[8]

The Sabarmati Express was attacked twice—the first time when they stopped it at Signal Falia; the second time some three hours after the stone-throwing and burning incident, when the train was being shunted to detach the two affected coaches. As per police testimonies, two sets of mob resumed throwing stones on the surviving passengers waiting in the yard for the train to resume its onward journey to Ahmedabad.

As per the instruction of the chief minister, the remaining passengers were sent off to their respective destinations within four and a half hours at 12.40 p.m. This was done to ensure that Godhra station didn't get flooded with thousands of anxious relatives and the normal train traffic was not disrupted for long.

The 176-page report of the Commission concluded that the Godhra train carnage was a 'pre-planned conspiracy' hatched a day prior to the carnage. The purpose was to instil a sense of fear in the administration. The Commission also concluded that: "There is absolutely no evidence to show that either the chief minister and/or any other minister(s) in his Council of ministers or police officers had played any role in the Godhra incident or that there was any lapse on their part in the matter of providing protection, relief, and rehabilitation to the victims of communal riots or in the matter of not complying with the recommendations and directions given by National Human Rights Commission."[9]

It is significant that the Nanavati Commission was constrained to record the strange and devious conduct of the railway ministry:

> Strangely, the railway and its staff at Godhra did not file any statement or produce any record (on their own), which would have helped the Commission in finding out how the Godhra incident had actually happened, even though the incident happened within the Godhra railway yard, there was a fire in the train, large number of persons had lost their lives, many others had received injuries, and the railway police was required to resort to firing to prevent further damage. The Commission had to issue summons to the concerned railway men

8 Ibid., p. 125.
9 Ibid., p. 175.

> to appear before the Commission and give evidence. The Commission was also required to issue summons to higher officers to compel them to produce certain relevant documents.[10]

It is noteworthy that Nitish Kumar was the railway minister when the Godhra massacre took place. It seems, right from 2002, he was busy making common cause with the anti-Modi lobbies to build false cases against him. After Nitish lost the railway minister's post following the defeat of the NDA government in 2004, the Congress Party-led UPA government appointed Lalu Yadav as the new railway minister. Yadav played even worse games by appointing the UC Banerjee Committee to give a clean chit to the Godhra accused.

UPA Plays with Fire, Appoints Illegal Banerjee Committee

Even during the NDA regime, the Congress Party did everything within its means to obstruct the functioning of the Nanavati Commission. Once the UPA government came into power in Delhi, they brazenly violated all rules and regulations to sabotage the working of the Nanavati Commission by:

- Getting the Railway Minister Lalu Yadav to appoint another commission headed by Justice Banerjee to inquire into the Godhra incident, vide Government of India notification dated September 2, 2004. This, despite the fact that a railway ministry appointed committee had no power to carry out an investigation under criminal law.
- Getting the Supreme Court to take direct charge of investigating all riot-related cases and take away the jurisdiction of the State Government.

The Banerjee Committee was asked to needlessly duplicate the work scope of the Nanavati Commission. As per the provision of the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, Section 3(b), once a commission has been appointed to inquire into any matter by a state government, the Central government shall not appoint another commission to inquire into the same matter. Thus, the appointment of the U.C. Banerjee Committee was both unconstitutional and against the government's own rules and regulations.

The Banerjee Committee submitted its report on March 3, 2006 just ahead of the Bihar assembly election with the barely-veiled purpose of consolidating Muslim votes in favour of Lalu's party, the Rashtriya Janata

10 Ibid., p. 7.

Dal and its ally, the Congress Party. Thus far, all evidence had showed that a Muslim mob had attacked and set fire to the Sabarmati Express. But Justice Banerjee came up with the conclusion that the fire in Sabarmati Express was "accidental" and that the train had *not* been attacked from outside.[11] Lalu Yadav, in fact, rushed the Committee to release its interim report just ahead of the 2005 assembly polls in Bihar. The Gujarat High Court passed an order on March 7, 2006 directing the Railway Ministry and all others not to give any further publicity to the Railway Ministry Committee and not to implement or take any further action based on their report. The Railway Ministry challenged this order in the Supreme Court, which in turn directed the Gujarat High Court to decide the matter expeditiously.

On October 13, 2006, the Gujarat High Court passed a noteworthy judgment declaring the Banerjee Committee illegal. It quashed the notification by the Union Railway Ministry constituting the Banerjee Committee. The court order also mentioned that releasing the interim report before the Bihar elections was a mala fide act.

Bizarre Justifications in Defense of Godhra Accused

The Godhra accused were defended by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, and a Congress proxy NGO, Jan Sangharsh Manch. The arguments they put forth to rubbish the charge of pre-planned attack by a group of miscreants (some with pronounced Congress Party links) not only added insult to injury but also revealed the extent to which the Congress Party could go in defending those guilty of mass murder.

One of the most bizarre charges made by the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, in its statement-cum-affidavit dated July 1, 2002, signed by its then President Chaudhari Amarsingh Bhilabhai was that Narendra Modi, with the help of a state minister, had himself conspired and instigated this massacre to trigger communal riots in Gujarat. The absurdity of it is clear from the fact that just three days before, Modi had won his first ever election from Rajkot with a massive support from the Muslim community

11 DNA Press, "Excerpts from the Justice U C Banerjee Committee Report," *DNA India*, March 3, 2006, *Web.* http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-excerpts-from-the-justice-u-c-banerjee-committee-report-1016092.

in Rajkot, which defiantly deserted the Congress Party to vote for Modi.[12] Moreover, on February 27, 2002, Modi was to present his first ever budget. No chief minister would plan such a disruption on such an eventful day.

Mischievous Stories Spread by Congress Allies

The Nanavati Commission notes that, "Till July, 2002 neither the Jan Sangharsh Manch, nor the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, nor anyone else had suggested that the Godhra incident had not happened in the manner reported by the media and as stated by the State government and others including the concerned railway personnel and the passengers..."[13]

Abduction of Muslim girl provoked Muslims? One of the devious stories put into circulation by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (JUH) was that one of the *karsevaks* had attempted to abduct a Muslim girl and that the Muslim mob that attacked the train had only intended to recover the girl. On December 27, 2002, advocate of JUH, gave an application for calling one Sofiyabanu before the Commission to give evidence. She was examined on January 13, 2003. She stated that she was a resident of Vadodara, and was on a visit to her aunt Jaitunbibi residing at Signal Falia. On February 27, at about 7:30 a.m., she had gone with her mother and sister to catch a train to Vadodara. Suddenly, some *karsevaks* shouting 'Jai Bajrang' came out on the platform. "One person with a saffron colour belt had put his hand on her mouth and by pulling her, had tried to take her towards the train. On her raising shouts, he let go of her."

The Nanavati Commission junked this story as as post-facto fabrication for the following reasons:

> After careful scrutiny of her evidence, the Commission comes to the conclusion that the version given by her does not appear to be true… The alleged attempt to abduct her was made while they were near the bookstall. That would mean that they were almost in the middle of the covered portion of the platform and very close to the offices of the railway staff. The evidence discloses that there were many persons on the platform. Apart from passengers, many Muslim vendors

12 See chapter 8.

13 Justice Nanavati and Justice Mehta, "Part I: Sabarmati Express Train Incident of Godhra," p. 136.

were there. The railway staff was present in their offices. Some policemen were also present. If she had raised shouts to save her then they would have been heard at least by some persons who were near about. But not a single vendor or anyone else has come forward to support her version. According to her evidence, they had then gone inside the office of the booking clerk. They did not inform anyone there about what had happened… Her explanation that she was much frightened and had giddiness and, therefore, they had decided not to go back to Vadodara on that day, does not appear to be true…

It is also difficult to believe that a *Ramsevak* had attempted to abduct a Ghanchi Muslim girl from Godhra railway station, and that too in the presence of so many persons. Likely consequences of such an act would have deterred any *Ramsevak* from doing so. Her evidence is that they had gone away from the railway station when Sabarmati Express train was about to start. By that time, most of the *Ramsevaks* must have gone inside the train. As regards when she had talked about this incident to anyone, she has stated that three or four days after the incident, she was taken to a relief camp which was set up in Iqbal school and there she was questioned by some press reporters. After about a month her statement was recorded by the railway police. In her police statement she had stated that after about five or six days somebody belonging to their caste had taken her to Iqbal school. As she had not stated anything to anyone about this incident till then no outsider would have come to know about the same. Under the circumstances, it becomes doubtful and suspicious why somebody had approached her after about five days and taken her to a relief camp and that too at the time when press reporters were present.

Salim Panwala had ran shouting before Sabarmati Express train had started from the station that one Ghanchi Muslim girl was being abducted by the *karsevaks*. Salim Panwala was not present near that place and had not seen the alleged attempt to kidnap Sofiyabanu and yet he had raised an alarm that a Ghanchi Muslim girl was being kidnapped by the *karsevaks*. This evidence discloses that Salim Panwala had appeared on the platform at about the time when Mohammad Latika and Sidik Bakar had gone running near the open space towards the engine side. For all these reasons the Commission is inclined to take the view that such an incident had, in fact, not happened and probably what Sofiyabanu has stated was at the instance of Salim Panwala who had spread such a false rumour. It appears to be an attempt to pass off the false rumour as true. If what Salim Panwala had said was true, then an attempt would have been made to look for her while the

train was standing on the station for about eight to ten minutes thereafter. Nobody had done that.[14]

Did Passengers pull the chain and not miscreants? The Commission also rubbished the story put forth by the Congress and the Jan Sangharsh Manch that the two-time chain pulling, which brought the train to a halt near Signal Falia, was done by passengers who were left behind and not by miscreants.[15]

According to the Inquiry Commission, this was a pre-planned move by those who had conspired to attack the train to trap it at Signal Falia as it was surrounded by a Ghanchi Muslim settlement where the rioters would have a free hand unlike at the station where there was at least a token presence of police and numerous other witnesses.

Did *karsevaks* invite death by attacking tea vendor? Defending the accused, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and the Jan Sangharsh Manch had initially argued that the *Ramsevaks* travelling by this train had quarreled with some Muslim vendors at Ujjain and Rudauli stations and, therefore, by way of retaliation, this incident took place at Godhra. Since the news of this had reached Godhra, the Muslims were already upset. At Godhra, the *karsevaks* again misbehaved with vendors leading to an altercation. But all witnesses, including the railway staff, denied any such incident at Ujjain. Even if there was a grain of truth that there was some argument or fight with a street vendor at Ujjain or Rudauli, for an Ujjain street vendor to organise a mob of 1,500 or more to burn a railway coach hundreds of miles away would point towards the existence of a countywide criminal mafia network rather than a simple story of "action-reaction". In his statement, the senior divisional manager of the Railways at Ratlam had stated that the train moved peacefully up to Dahod.

The only other evidence on this point is that of Assistant Sub-Inspector Ratnabhai and head constable Lakhabhai of Dahod railway outpost. They stated that when the train had arrived at Dahod railway station, some Ramsevaks travelling in the train had come out on the platform for taking water, tea, etc. and they had raised slogans like *"Jai Shri Ram, Mandir wahin banayenge, Ram ka naam badhayenge*." (We will build the mandir at the same spot and bring glory to Ram's name). Since they saw so many

14 Ibid., pp. 48-50.
15 Ibid., p. 106.

Ramsevaks travelling in that train, they had thought it fit to inform the Godhra railway police about the same.

The testimonies before the Commission, including that of the railway staff, established that even though the train was packed far beyond capacity, no altercation or fight had broken out at any of the previous railway stations. The Commission notes that, by all accounts, the most the *karsevaks* did was to sing *ramdhun* and other bhajans. They also shouted slogans in favour of Ram Mandir. But none of this led to any altercation or fights at any of the previous railway stations.[16] The Commission, therefore, concludes:

> From the evidence of all these witnesses and other material on record, it becomes clear that, except overcrowding in the train and occasional raising of slogans inside the train and on platforms of the intervening stations, the *Ramsevaks* had not done anything and no incident had happened earlier which could have led to the incident which later on happened at Godhra. In the absence of any evidence whatsoever indicating any incident on the way, the Commission has no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that the suggestion made by Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind that a quarrel had taken place between *Ramsevaks* and vendors at Ujjain railway station is without any basis. Its journey from Ayodhya to Godhra was trouble-free. [17]

However, at Godhra railway station, some kind of altercation—spontaneous or stage-managed—did take place. When the train arrived at the station, there were about ten police constables of GRP and two constables of RPF on duty at the platform. Deputy SS Yusufali Saiyad told the Commission that whenever a train arrives at Godhra station, many unlicensed vendors rush to the platform to sell tea, eatables, etc. This business is controlled by mafia elements who decide which unlicensed vendors can enter the platform, who in turn employ others to do the actual vending. This is the typical story of India's notorious license-quota raj producing mafias wherever it is imposed.

Ajay Kanubhai, an employee of one of the tea vendors, in his statement revealed the well-organised racket through which a small group controls vendors' access to the station. He said almost all vendors who sell their

16 Ibid., pp. 38-40.
17 Ibid., p. 41.

goods on the platform through employees like him were Ghanchi Muslims whose leaders were Salim Panwala and Razak Kurkur. Both were good friends and business associates. They controlled all the vendors who were either forced or induced to sell fake pouches of mineral water, fake aerated drinks, and other articles of Razak Kurkur. All the vendors were afraid of Salim Panwala and Razak Kurkur. The vendors themselves were strong-headed persons, and neither the railway staff nor the railway policemen were able to control them.[18]

During the five-minute halt of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, some passengers stepped out for tea. Sidik Bahar, a tea vendor, reportedly had an altercation with *Ramsevaks* regarding payment for the tea they bought from him. The *Ramsevaks* said they had paid, while Bakar said they hadn't. In this altercation, some *Ramsevaks* had allegedly given two stick blows to Sidik Bakar.[19] But instead of going to the police, the two Muslim vendors (Latika and Sidik Bakar) ran out towards Signal Falia and collected a crowd that stoned the train.[20]

This incident was used by the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee, the Jan Sangharsh Manch and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind to argue that the *karsevaks* had "provoked" the attack on the train by their aggressive behavior. This theory was also liberally peddled by Teesta Setalvad's NGO along with the fake story about the attempted abduction of a Muslim girl. She brazenly declared that the *karsevaks* could hardly be called "innocent passengers" since they were part of VHP mobilisation. This has now become part of the Left-Congress apologia arguing that the *karsevaks* had "invited" trouble on themselves.

The logical conclusion of such a perverse argument justifying roasting alive of a whole coach full of rail passengers because one or two passengers allegedly had a scuffle with a tea vendor would be that the reactive violence that followed in the rest of Gujarat is also justified. In any case, it is inconceivable that a 1,500 strong mob can be collected within two-three minutes to attack a train after it has left the station and that this mob could be so motivated by that small incident to fight pitched battles with the police in order to take revenge. Given the rest of the circumstantial

18 Ibid., p. 42
19 Ibid., pp. 43-4
20 Ibid., p. 46

evidence it seems highly likely that the altercation was also stage managed by those who had already planned to burn the train.

Were *karsevaks* cooking on a stove that caused fire? Another absurd argument put forward by the Jan Sangharsh Manch and the Congress Party's lawyers in court questioned the very existence of the mob that set fire to coach S/6 and argued that the fire was accidental—caused by a cooking stove being overturned in the moving train.

The Commission rubbished this on the ground that the entire train, including coach S/6,was so densely packed that people were sitting on the floor, lying under the berths, sitting outside the toilet, blocking access to exit and entry doors. In such a situation, it is biarre to suggest that people would find place to set up a makeshift kitchen for cooking a fresh meal.

Secondly, if a stove had caught fire at one end, people could have easily moved out of the train from the other end. The fact that the doors were locked from outside by miscreants, the fact that the windowpanes had all been smashed, and the train carried visible signs of heavy stone pelting clearly showed this was a cock and bull story.

Thirdly, unless large quantities of inflammable material had not been thrown into the train, the nature of burns caused could not be as severe, and a litre of kerosene from a stove could not have led to the very floor of the compartment caving in.

Did electrical short circuit cause fire? The flimsy argument that a short circuit in the electrical wiring of the S/6 coach led to the fire was also junked by the Nanavati Commission on the ground that in case of a short circuit, the passengers would not have climbed on the top berths for shelter because all electrical wiring is situated near the compartment ceiling. Moreover, a short circuit fire could not have engulfed the entire coach in smoke and flames within a minute. It would have given passengers enough time to escape.

Unfortunately, these bizarre stories about the self-ignition of the coach were given respectability by the then Railway Minister Lalu Yadav who appointed the one-man committee in September 2004 under retired judge U.C. Banerjee. The Committee report declared that the train compartment being so high above the ground could not possibly have been set fire to by outside attackers and that it was a mishap or accident. The Banerjee Committee also argued that the mob at Signal Falia consisted of "innocent" bystanders and that the fire could have been either due to stove burst or electrical short circuit.

Media Spin: *Ramsevaks* Invited Trouble

The speed with which the Congress Party and its allied NGOs were able to spoon-feed a partisan version of the Godhra massacre to a pliant media, points to the conclusion that this was a pre-planned script. In his book *Godhra: The Missing Rage,*[21] S.K. Modi says:

> The television news channels showed the pictures of the burning S/6 coach and the dead bodies throughout the day. But something was missing. The rage was missing… There was no trace of indignation ...A few days after the event, Jaya Jaitley of the Samata Party, wrote: "...on Godhra there was stubborn silence when the Treasury benches begged the Opposition to join in a unanimous condemnation of the event..." Sonia Gandhi did not feel the need to call on the prime minister on February 27…The silence on February 27, 2002 was deafening. The indifference was complete. The insensitivity was infuriating.

A number of journalists echoed the slant given by the Congress allies that the karsevaks had invited the trouble; they had it coming because they were mobilised by Hindu organisations and were bent upon constructing a Ram Temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid. NDTV, the most steadfast mouthpiece of the Congress Party, played a key role in creating a distorted discourse on Godhra carnage because of the prestige it then carried. Its sanitised version of Godhra incident on February 27, in sharp contrast to its hysterical coverage of post-Godhra riots, became the standard template for all others:

> At least 57 people are feared killed and 43 injured as *unidentified persons* attacked and set on fire four bogies of an Express train carrying hundreds of *karsevaks* near Godhra railway station in Gujarat. [Emphasis mine]

NDTV referring to the attackers as "unidentified persons" when the leaders of the mob violence were known to the people of Godhra from day one indicates intent to misinform.

The headline in *The Times of India* dated February 28, read: "Mob attacks Gujarat train, 55 die." The writer of this report, Sajjad Shaikh, literally justified the mass murder on the basis of rumours floated by

21 S.K. Modi, *Godhra: The Missing Rage* (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2004), pp. 26-9.

the perpetrators of the violence. "*Karsevaks* in the train misbehaved with some washerwomen of Signal Falia." He also cites: "The rumour of an attack on a religious place in Dahod" as one of the reasons for the Godhra incident. The implication is that the burning alive of 55 persons is somehow understandable since the *karsevaks* allegedly invited trouble.

The Hindu reported as follows in its issue dated February 28, 2002: "57 killed as a mob torches the train in Gujarat." The writer of this report, Manas Dasgupta, states that "eyewitnesses said that about 1,200 *Ramsevaks* were travelling in the train. The local people in the Muslim-dominated Godhra town had been 'irritated' by the abusive language used by the *Ramsevaks* while they were going to Ayodhya by the same train a few days ago. They had reportedly raised slogans as the train approached Godhra on the return journey this morning." This again implies that the *karsevaks* had provoked violence by their slogans. The strangest part of this report is the implication that Godhra vendors had waited for days to avenge the alleged abused by *karsevaks* on their way to Ayodhya.

The Hindustan Times carried a front-page headline: "Gujarat hit by Ayodhya backlash." This too indirectly justifies the action of those who set fire to the train.

The moment retaliatory violence sparked off in the rest of Gujarat, the Godhra massacre was underplayed and sought to be erased from public memory as if it had nothing to do with the riots that followed. On a parallel track, reports in print media as well as TV began reiterating that it was the logical outcome of the Ram Mandir movement. For example, *The Hindu*, in its issue dated March 1, 2002, wrote:

> The grisly Godhra episode of arson on Wednesday that left 50-odd passengers of the Sabarmati Express dead—most of them *karsevaks* returning from Ayodhya—and the backlash of mindless violence it had triggered elsewhere in the state, as rampaging mobs in a series of reprisals hit back at the minority community and its properties, are clear, disturbing pointers to the explosive communal build-up across the country as a direct consequence of the VHP's provocative and destructive campaign for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. What happened in Godhra, about which there are different and conflicting versions, is a dastardly act and it deserves to be condemned unequivocally.

> **This said, one cannot but pinpoint the harsh reality that events such as the horrors of Godhra were tragically predictable as a result of the wounding and aggressive communal campaign of VHP.** It has been ruthlessly pursuing its agenda of commencing the temple construction on 15th March, come-what-may and whipping up communal passions through mass mobilisation of *Ramsevaks*—some one million of them—across the country. [Emphasis mine]

In the March 1 issue of *The Times of India*, Siddharth Varadarajan wrote, "While official enquiry will establish the extent to which the attack on the Sabarmati Express was pre-meditated, there can be no doubt about the planned nature of the violence directed against Gujarat's Muslims on Thursday (28 February)." As analysed by the www.gujaratriots.com[22] team:

> The double standards are evident from his report, which differentiates the incidents of February 27 from the incidents of February 28. While examining the pre-meditation behind the Godhra attacks on February 27, he says that it is "official enquiry" which will decide whether the attack on *karsevaks* was pre-meditated or not. But when it comes to violent reaction of Hindus on February 28, he takes it in his own hands to pass a judgment that the attacks by the Hindus on Gujarat's Muslims were "pre-planned" in nature....
>
> This news report was carried just two days after the Godhra carnage. The gruesome murder of the *karsevaks* is mentioned only once in the 450-plus word report and rest of the report is full of gory descriptions of how the Muslims are being brutally killed in the aftermath.

Reports by foreign correspondents also built on the version floated by the Congress-allied NGOs. But few matched the inventiveness of a report in the British paper, *The Independent,* by Peter Popham on March 20, 2002:

> …What happened in car S/6 was the hideous finale. The story began nearly 36 hours earlier. Many were also drunk or stoned, or equipped to get that way: flexible, tolerant Hinduism has no hard and fast rules about such things. And they were coming back to Gujarat, the only state in the Indian union that is

22 "The Entire Happenings in Godhra: How the Massacre Occurred," *Gujarat Riots: The True Story*, May 22, 2008, *Web.* http://www.gujaratriots.com/index.php/page/3/?s.

still 'dry'. All the more reason to have a bottle or two tucked away. … The train was late: after a day and a half, it was running four-and-a-half hours behind schedule. That's why it arrived in Godhra not at 2.55 a.m., as scheduled, but at 7.15 a.m. By this time, the *karsevaks* were much the worse for wear. Trouble had started at Dahod station, nearly one hour and 75 km up the tracks. The train had reached Dahod around 6 a.m., and a number of *karsevaks* got out of compartment S/6 to have tea and snacks at a stall on the platform. Already they were drunk and unruly. An argument broke out between the Hindus and the Muslim man running the tea stall – according to one account, they refused to pay unless he chanted 'Jai Shri Ram', the chant of Lord Ram's devotees. He refused to oblige, and they started to smash up his stall, before climbing back into the carriage. The stallholder filed a complaint with the railway police. [The Nanavati Inquiry Commission found no evidence of such a complaint at Dahod.]

Suddenly, the row took a dangerous new turn: the *karsevaks* grabbed hold of a Muslim woman. Her identity and how she became involved remain ambiguous but four different witnesses mention this event. One says it was the 16-year-old daughter of the abused tea-seller. She 'came forward and tried to save her father.' Another mentions a woman washing clothes by the railway line being hauled away. A third describes how a Muslim girl wearing a burqa and taking a shortcut to school through the station platform was pounced on and dragged into the carriage. All agree that a Muslim woman was hauled into the carriage by the *karsevaks*, who slammed the door and would not let her go. Refusing to be quoted by name, a local policeman confirms the story.

And suddenly, what had been just an ugly little fracas, a drunken pantomime of power and subjugation, became something far more explosive. **The *karsevaks* were too drunk for their own good or they would have chosen a different station at which to pull such a stunt.** Because now the social geography of Godhra came into play. [Emphasis mine]

…Godhra station, to the regret of the Hindus, is located in an area that is now entirely Muslim. And a huddle of Muslim-owned businesses sprang up in shacks alongside the tracks, many of them motor-repair yards. This little slum, known as Signal Falia, has all the material a riot could require: stacks of bricks, petrol, and paraffin and calor gas cylinders. But it also had the necessary human material: a community impoverished and bitter and surviving on the margins of criminality.

The woman seized by the *karsevaks* was dragged into compartment S/6, and

word of what had happened began to spread. 'The girl began screaming for help,' said Ahmed, a wood dealer who was waiting for a train going the other way. 'Muslims who were travelling on the train got off. People began pouring on to the platform to try to rescue her. I ran home – I could see trouble was brewing...'

The train moved off, and the gathering crowd began pelting the carriage with bricks. Inside the train, someone pulled the emergency cord; the train stopped then moved off again; the cord was pulled again one km out of the station, and this time the train stopped and stayed stopped. 'People in the vicinity... started to gather near the train,' says one witness. 'The mob... requested that the *karsevaks* return the girl. But instead of returning the girl, they started closing their windows. This infuriated the mob...'

The brawl had become a battle, with the *karsevaks* piling in with their swords and sticks, and a crowd now said to be 1,000-strong streaming in from the slum, bringing petrol, gas, rags – anything that would burn. Their gas cylinders broke the bars on the windows and exploded inside; the petrol bombs flew through and set the upholstery and the people trapped inside on fire. By the time that the police arrived in strength one hour later, there was nothing to be saved…

Unfortunately, the fabrication and spicing up of the story in *The Independent* became the favorite version of "secularists" and was made to spread like virus through the social media. Anyone who knows Gujarat even casually would know that even those Gujaratis who violate prohibition and consume liquor would never do so publicly, certainly not in front of women and children- and that too while returning from a *dharmic yatra*.

But the fountain head of all these devious interpretation was Teesta Setalvad. She made it politically fashionable to say that since the Hindus killed in the Godhra train carnage were "militant *karsevaks*, they "could hardly be described as innocent travelers". This implies that they deserved to be butchered. Even today, the website of *Communalism Combat* peddles the same prejudice despite the fact that Nanavati Commission has recorded that the *karsevaks* did not do anything to invite being butchered.

At that time, Vir Sanghvi, Chief Editor of *The Hindustan Times*, was one of the few journalists to have warned against the tendency to justify

the train massacre. His article[23] written in response to the partisan TV coverage of February 27, 2002, says:

> There is something profoundly worrying in the response of what might be called the secular establishment to the massacre in Godhra...Some versions have it that the *karsevaks* shouted anti-Muslim slogans; others that they taunted and harassed Muslim passengers. According to these versions, the Muslim passengers got off at Godhra and appealed to members of their community for help. Others say that the slogans were enough to enrage the local Muslims and that the attack was revenge…it does seem extraordinary that slogans shouted from a moving train, or at a railway platform, should have been enough to enrage local Muslims, enough for 2,000 of them to have quickly assembled at eight in the morning, having already managed to procure petrol bombs and acid bombs.

Unfortunately, in the coverage of Gujarat riots, *The Hindustan Times* and most other newspapers dutifully allowed the Congress Party bias to creep in all their reporting. Consequently, very few are aware that the Nanavati Commission and courts found Godhra violence to be the handiwork of mischievous elements within the Congress Party who also allegedly had links with Pakistani outfits. When I asked Modi whether, apart from local Congress leaders, any of the Delhi-based leaders were likely to have been part of Godhra conspiracy, he said:

> We arrested and tried those who were found guilty after due enquiries and investigations. One part of the report done by Nanavati Commission has already been released. After that, the SIT did its investigation and we proceeded on the basis of those. If I bring in party politics into the Godhra incident, I will be causing incalculable damage to Gujarat for years to come. I should not bring in my personal assessment into these matters. Such things should be handled professionally. Government agencies responsible for such issues must be allowed to do their job without hindrance - be it the Gujarat police or the SIT appointed by the Supreme Court. Modi has no business to give his personal assessment.

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23 Vir Sanghvi, *One-way Ticket: My Take on the Godhra Tragedy When It Happened*, February 23, 2011, *Web.* http://virsanghvi.com/Article-Details.aspx?Key=611. (The article was published in 2002 in the *Hindustan Times*, right after the Godhra train burning incident occurred).

Modi won his first ever election on February 24, 2002 with massive support of Muslims of Rajkot leading to utter panic in the Congress camp because Modi's success in mobilising Muslims' in favour of the BJP would spell the doom for the Congress Party. It would rob Sonia's Congress of its one and only captive vote bank and trump card of "secularism" to trip BJP. It is, therefore, not surprising that Congress Party used a tried and tested method of pitching Hindus against Muslims by instigating anti-social elements among its members and supporters in Godhra to set fire to the train carrying VHP *karsevaks* returning from Ayodhya.

Decades ago, a prominent Congress leader, Kanhaiya Lal Munshi (1887-1971) had warned his party colleague, and the then Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru (1889-1964) in a letter stating, "If every time there is an inter-communal conflict, the majority is blamed regardless of the merits of the question… the springs of traditional tolerance will dry up."[24]

Far from heeding this warning, under the guise of upholding secularism, the Congress Party has made demonisation of the majority its main political plank. This perversion is unthinkable in any other country of the world.

24 K.M. Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents: Pilgrimage to Freedom, 1902-1950*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2012), p. 312.

CHAPTER 12

Who Needed Post Godhra Riots?
The Congress or Narendra Modi?

Do you know the total strength of police in Gujarat? At how many places could the police have rescued people simultaneously? Why don't they talk about the role of the army and the paramilitary forces? Why don't they ever talk about how many lives were saved by timely action? Why only talk of those who got killed?... If at each such place, there is a mob of 10,000 to 15,000 while the local thana only has 10-20 policemen, how much can the police do, especially if out of these 20, may be only five have rifles and one has a pistol… Most policemen only carry a danda (staff). How does such a policeman confront an angry crowd of 10,000 who are pelting stones?... The Hindus as well as Muslims gave vent to their anger. There were many places where Muslims ended up being the vulnerable side while at some other places, the Hindus ended up as the weaker group.
Rais Khan, the right hand man of Teesta Setalvad from 2002-2008

The post-Godhra violence of 2002 has been incessantly described as a "pogrom," a "state-sponsored massacre of Muslims" carried out by the BJP, with Narendra Modi playing a key role in it. This has become such a set narrative that anyone who dares challenge this distorted version is at once dubbed as a supporter of Hitlerian fascist politics and becomes the target of a blind hate-crusade.

Difference between Pogrom and Riot

As someone who has personally covered several riots, I believe some thumb-rules are necessary for understanding the nature of intercommunity violence and distinguishing between a riot and a pogrom. A 'pogrom' is defined as a violent massacre of an ethnic or religious group. The term was originally used to refer to one-sided unprovoked attacks on Jews by the Christians of Russia and East Europe. Jews remained a brutally oppressed and hated minority who suffered endless violence at

the hands of Christians in all of Europe and Russia culminating into a massive genocide in Hitler's Germany. This cannot be said of Muslims in India because for centuries, the Hindu majority was ruled by Muslim invaders and monarchs. Many of these Muslim rulers were brutal in their persecution of their Hindu subjects.

Similarly, 'massacre' is defined as an incident whereby a community, or a group, is killed by another, and the perpetrating party is perceived to be in total control of force, while the victimised group is totally at the mercy of its aggressors.

The killings of Sikhs in November 1984, under Congress rule in Delhi and other cities of North India, can be accurately described as a pogrom or massacre because the killings were totally one-sided. It was not a Hindu-Sikh riot. In fact, the Hindu community was as stunned by the murderous mobs, as were the Sikhs. Congress Party had hired goons who pretended frenzy and butchered over 3,000 Sikhs in Delhi alone. Many more thousands were killed or burnt alive in several North Indian cities. The dead were all Sikhs; only Sikh women were raped. There was not a single incident of Sikhs having killed Hindus or abducted women of any community in retaliation. Sikhs are not a helpless community in ordinary times, nor are they an oppressed religious minority. However, since Congress Party politicians are known to have led murderous mobs and the top leadership of the Congress Party is known to have deliberately immobilised the law and order machinery, the killing brigades and arsonists got a free hand for three–four days.

Even though the army was ready at hand in Delhi Cantonment, it was not called for three long days till the worst was over. The police did not fire a single shot at the murderous mobs. They were asked to look the other way or actively assist the killer mobs. There wasn't even an instance of lathi charge to disperse mobs. There were no arrests of arsonists during those days. It was uncontrolled mayhem from October 31, 1984 to November 3, 1984. The loss of property was also one-sided. Only Sikh homes were set on fire; the mobs looted only Sikh business establishments and houses. No Sikh went on a looting spree.

However, the picture was substantially different in the Godhra and post-Godhra violence in Gujarat. It all began with the unprovoked, one-way, pre-planned attack on Hindus by a politically-instigated Muslim mob. Even in the post-Godhra violence, neither the killings nor the burning and looting of homes and business establishments was as one-

sided as came to be portrayed through selective filtering and reporting of facts about the 2002 riots. This is not to deny that in the post-Godhra violence, the Muslims suffered much greater losses—in terms of lives, injuries, and property. This is also not to deny that in many cases, leading politicians instigated and exploited the mass outrage, and in several instances, the police looked the other way while mobs went on to create mayhem.

However, despite obvious failures and lapses—some deliberate and many unintended—facts established by subsequent inquiries clearly show that the government as a whole did not look the other way. The chief minister responded with speed and firmness even while some of his cabinet and party colleagues acted in ways that added fuel to fire. Unlike the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre, which was a solo performance by the Congress Party, in the 2002 Gujarat riots, the BJP and Congress leaders both played an equal role. Most people in Gujarat say that in those mad days, most people forgot which party they belonged to and instead acted as Hindu or Muslim rioters.

For example, way back in 2003, Maulana Madni of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, who is otherwise known to be a pro-Congress and an anti-BJP Muslim leader, had publicly alleged Congress participation in the riots and even named some Congress leaders who played an active role. To quote a report by Rajesh Ramachandran of *The Times of India*, posted on Times News Service on August 9, 2003:

> The Congress has been going to town over Best Bakery and other instances of the Narendra Modi government's complicity in the anti-Muslim violence, which shook Gujarat last year. But, when it comes to the involvement of its own party cadre in the killings, 10 Janpath maintains a deafening silence.
>
> According to the JUH, "most Congress corporators" and some Congress leaders of Gujarat had actively participated in last year's riots. Mahmood As'ad Madani, JUH general secretary told *The Times of India*: "We wrote letters to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, gave a list of Congress leaders involved in the riots, asked her to take action against them but to no avail." On April 29, 2002, for example, the JUH received a list of 25 Congress leaders from its Gujarat chapter, which was promptly forwarded to her. This included a former Congress minister, a sitting MLA, and a former MP.
>
> Then, on August 20, Madani reminded Gandhi, "Similarly our appeal forwarded to you in respect of involvement of Congress MLAs, corporators,

and workers in the Gujarat carnage along with the list of culpable names remains disregarded."

The JUH insists it had accurate information from the ground. For instance, its Gujarat branch had written to the police commissioner of Vadodara city on March 21 that, "After the Godhra incident an urgent meeting of the activists of the BJP, VHP, RSS, and Bajrang Dal was held under the leadership of Yogesh Patel (MLA) and ChimmanGandhi (Congress corporator). They had allotted the activists their jobs, made a plan, and instructed the activists to carry out this work without any fear and told them that they would get full support of police officers."

The Gujarat JUH had mapped the Congress leadership even at the district level. Mehsana and Patan districts' list has eight names of Congress leaders including local MP Atmaram Patel as having played a "negative role." A fax message sent on May 1 from Mehsana has this against Patel's column: "Still has not come to help Muslims; taking sides in favour of a criminal person of Sardarpur and Ladoi villages."

A list of 15 from Anand is headed by a secretary of the Gujarat youth Congress. But to be fair to the Congress and the JUH, the report is all praise for the 'positive role' played by Patan MP Pravin Rashtrapal.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind secretary NA Farooqui says, "The Congress has committed sins of omission and commission during the riots. Former MP Ehsan Jafri had called up Sonia Gandhi for help. She didn't take a strong stand in her subsequent visit to Gujarat. The local bodies were mostly headed by the Congress which could have done a lot for relief and rehabilitation, but it was all left to the NGOs."

In 2002 itself, I had heard several people, including some leftist NGO activists, tell me in private conversations that the reason why Sonia Gandhi avoided meeting Zakia Jafri on her first visit to Ahmedabad after the riots was that she knew Zakia would give her an earful about the role of Congress Party leaders in the attack on Gulberg society that led to the brutal killing of her husband. Several local Congress workers allegedly joined BJP and VHP workers in the mob that hacked Jafri to death and killed others on February 28. None of the senior Congress leaders had come to Jafri's aid though he phoned several of them.

The manner in which certain Congress-supported NGOs converted this into a Modi-engineered riot by cooking up false evidence and propping up false witnesses has now been well documented even by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) appointed by the Supreme Court.

Was it in Modi's Interest to Have Riots?

Let us examine the charges against Modi, and see whether there is any justification for believing that he instigated the 2002 riots.

The attack on Sabarmati Express at Signal Falia, just outside Godhra railway station, took place around 8 a.m. on February 27, 2002. Narendra Modi had won his first ever election from Rajkot on February 24, 2002 with a comfortable majority and with strong support of various Muslim communities in Rajkot. Even though the Congress Party had used various underhand means to launch a defamation campaign against Modi, he had not retaliated against them with counter slander nor indulged in tit-for-tat. In the four months from his assuming power on October 7 to the February 27 Godhra incident, every single government programme he launched, every single administrative measure he initiated, and every single speech he delivered, provided concrete evidence that:

- Modi's priority was all-round development of Gujarat.
- Modi's economic, social, and political agenda was inclusive. He consistently addressed himself to five crore Gujaratis. He never made sectional appeals to any caste, community, or religious group.
- He was not hostile or vindictive even towards the Congress, which attacked him incessantly, nor did he shun anti-BJP NGOs.
- He was trying to build a base for the politics of consensus and samrasta associated with Mahatma Gandhi. He even ensured samras (consensual) election to Rajya Sabha by having the BJP and the Congress rise above party divides to jointly agree on four names to represent Gujarat. He sought the help of Congress leaders in persuading Congress Chief Minister Digvijay Singh of Madhya Pradesh to allow the completion of Narmada dam in the overall interest of parched Gujarat. He encouraged BJP workers to work together with Congressmen in Gram Panchayats. He does so even today.
- He had close personal relations with several ordinary Muslims as well as Muslim community leaders.

Such a man had no reason to instigate riots within two days of winning his first election and certainly no earthly reason to unleash such a major catastrophe on the very day that he had to present his first ever budget in the assembly. Considering that he was visibly committed to fast-tracking economic and social development in Gujarat and proving himself to be an able administrator, he had put in a great deal of energy and effort into preparing his first budget. He had even less reason to be

vindictive towards the Muslims because they had defied the Congress to support him.

Modi's Response to Post-Godhra Riots

Here is a telling example of his concern for the Muslims. At the very start of the riots, Narendra Modi gave instructions that no harm should come to the 6,000 pilgrims who had gone for Haj from Gujarat. Officers were told that each one of them should be met at the airport and escorted safely to their homes. Several of them were from Rajkot from where Modi had fought his first election with massive Muslim support. This was not just a formal instruction. Each person and family of those 6,000 Hajis was actually escorted by the police to 400 different locations of Gujarat, right till their doorstep.

Normally, actions claimed to have been taken by governments during riots are not trustworthy, because no proper inquiries are held to authenticate those claims. There is usually a big disconnect between what the government claims to have done and what is actually done at the ground level. In the case of Gujarat, Modi's claims are well backed up by documentary evidence.

Measures claimed to have been put in operation by the Gujarat government deserve to be taken seriously for the following reasons:

- The state had appointed a two-member Commission headed by retired Supreme Court judge, Justice G.T. Nanavati to investigate the riots. Justice Nanavati was not handpicked by Modi, but recommended by the Supreme Court, to head the inquiry. The mandate of the Commission included inquiry into allegations against the chief minister as well as the entire council of ministers. The Nanavati Commission has been examining thousands of witnesses and documentary evidence in full glare of media. Its work is ongoing but the Part one of the Nanavati Commission Report released in 2008, has not pointed to a single bit of evidence to implicate Narendra Modi in the riots.
- Investigations by the SIT of the Supreme Court, which were rigorously monitored by the Apex Court, have also been under the intense scrutiny of zealous anti-Modi journalists. Some of the Supreme Court judges hearing this case were openly hostile to Modi and brazenly favoured the NGOs that had filed anti-Modi cases. Prashant Bhushan and Raju Ramachandran, the two amicus curiae appointed by the Supreme Court at different points, have been close collaborators of Teesta Setalvad. The

SIT itself was appointed at the behest of anti-Modi NGOs in response to a PIL filed by Teesta Setalvad and Zakia Jafri. Teesta Setalvad was consulted when the Supreme Court hand-picked officers with a track record of integrity to be part of SIT.

- The State government cannot fudge facts about the deployment of army and para-military forces because of elaborate protocols involved in the movement of troops.
- The number of bullets fired, pattern of arrests—how many Hindus and how many Muslims were killed in police firing, and how many were held under preventive detention laws—can't be falsified when high-level inquiries by central agencies are going on, especially at a time when the UPA's Central government is openly hostile to Gujarat government and the CBI is, by all accounts, working as a political arm of the Congress Party.

Inquiries and investigations into Modi's conduct have gone on for 12 long years under unprecedented media glare, almost all of the hostile kind. If even a small shred of evidence had been found against Narendra Modi, there would have been any number of cases filed against him by now. However, till date, neither the Congress Party nor its allied NGOs have been able to file a single FIR against Modi.

Modi's Handling of Godhra Train Tragedy

On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express was attacked at around 8 a.m. as it moved out of Godhra railway station and within minutes 59 men, women, and children were roasted alive while many more were severely injured while trying to escape. The chief minister was informed about this carnage at around 9 a.m. This is how Modi described his situation and his immediate response:

> On February 24, I got my election results. I was determined to enter the assembly only after getting elected as an MLA. That is why I fixed the assembly session for February 26. On the 27th, I was to present my first budget. I got news of the Godhra incident around 9 a.m. but could not leave for Godhra immediately because the assembly was scheduled to meet in the afternoon. Before going to the House, I called a small meeting and enquired about the situation. However, even before that meeting, I had given directions to Godhra officials that they should ensure that the rest of the passengers and trains should resume their journey at the earliest or else there would be

> thousands of stranded passengers at Godhra…. So my advice was that the remaining passengers of that ill-fated train should be sent to their respective destinations at the earliest possible. Our endeavor was to ensure speedy return of normalcy.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the train carrying the surviving passengers left Godhra around 12.40 p.m. that is within four and a half hours of the attack. This is in tune with Modi's overall approach to speedy action in times of emergency to avoid further chaos.

> It was God's grace or whatever, that I ordered for proper security arrangements at every station in order to pre-empt further outbreaks in other stations en route. This fact has not yet come to light anywhere. I also directed that when the surviving passengers reach Ahmedabad, they should be escorted directly to their homes—let there be no sloganeering on the way.
>
> The immediate response of my officials was, "No Sir, no further disturbances are likely to happen." Nevertheless, I insisted that they make advance preparations and take nothing for granted. Yet, when that train arrived at Anand Station, there was some trouble. That's when my officials told me, "Sir, you were right in your assessment."

On reaching the assembly to present the Budget, Modi informed the House about the tragedy and they held a two-minute silence to condole the deaths. To continue with his account:

> In the assembly, you don't get phone signals. The Budget business got over around 3 or 3.30 p.m. By this time, we heard the situation had turned worse. T.V. channels were giving live coverage. I had to leave for Baroda to reach Godhra. Our own helicopter was not in order. So we asked a private company for a helicopter. They refused saying, "We don't have a double engine helicopter and we are not allowed to carry VIPs in a single engine helicopter." I told them, "I'm not a VIP" and insisted that they provide me a helicopter. I told them that I would give them in writing that I was flying at my own risk.

The government imposed curfew in Godhra at 9.45 a.m. and issued shoot-at-sight orders in Godhra for those found indulging in mob violence. The Nanavati Commission has documented how the police used firepower in Godhra to control and scatter mobs out on a rampage.

Here is a small sample of news reports confirming that the state government had acted promptly. *The Hindu* wrote, "The Chief Minister Narendra Modi gave shoot-at-sight orders in Godhra" (February 28, 2002). *The Times of India* also reported the same: "The Gujarat government imposed an indefinite curfew and issued shoot-at-sight orders in Godhra after 57 people were killed and several injured when a mob set the Sabarmati Express on fire. Four bogies of the train were set on fire by miscreants at the Godhra station…"

This report was posted at 1.37 p.m. on February 27 itself, indicating that curfew had been promptly imposed. *The Tribune* (published from Chandigarh) reported on February 28: "Indefinite curfew was clamped and the shoot-at sight orders issued in Godhra town immediately after the incident..." (Notice the words 'immediately after')

All English dailies the next day reported on the same lines, including many foreign newspapers. *San Francisco Chronicle*, a US-newspaper, wrote on February 27 online: "Fearing the attack would ignite sectarian riots, Indian officials immediately stepped up security across this vast, religiously divided nation. The prime minister urged Hindus not to retaliate…"

Modi reached Godhra at about 4.30 p.m. and went to inspect the rail bogies, which had been set on fire. He says:

> When I reached Godhra, I sensed at once that a lot of *shadyantrakari* (subversive) elements were already over-active. We realised the full extent of that conspiracy much later. Within hours of the incident, an email was put in circulation in the name of a journalist, which floated the story that some of the *karsevaks* had sexually assaulted a Muslim girl. The media too readily blew up that story within minutes of that email. Now that I look back, I realise what perfect planning the mischief mongers had done because to run such a story within an hour or two of the incident is not that easy. None of the media professionals checked to find out who the girl was or if anyone had seen such a thing happening.
>
> When I met the media after taking a round of the railway station and the hospital where the dead and injured had been taken, I said in my statement that the guilty would be appropriately punished, that people should maintain peace and not take law into their hands. I didn't fully understand the government system till then, especially the police and security-related departments. However, I did direct my officers to remain alert and be ready to handle the situation if further trouble arose.

Preventive Measures Following Godhra Killings

The following pages provide a brief glimpse of actions taken by the chief minister to pre-empt the riots. The actions taken on the day of Godhra killings speak for themselves:

- In addition to imposition of curfew at Godhra and other potential trouble spots within in an hour and a half of Sabarmati Express killings, the first alert message by the Home Department was sent on February 27, 2002 itself to take precautionary measures including adequate police *bandobast*. All this was done much before the outbreak of riots.
- All the police commissioners, district magistrates, and superintendents of police were directed to remain in the headquarters to monitor the situation.
- Before Modi rushed from Gandhinagar to Godhra, the chief minister's office had directed that shoot-at-sight orders be issued to control mob violence where necessary.
- The entire 70,000-strong police force was deployed all over Gujarat even before a single retaliatory riot had taken place. The entire police force of 6,000 was deployed in sensitive areas of Ahmedabad on the very first day. *The Hindustan Times, The Telegraph* (of UK), and other papers confirmed in their editions on February 28 that more than 70,000 security men had been deployed in Gujarat on February 27. *The Telegraph*[1] and other foreign papers had also reported that security had not only been tightened in Gujarat, but in all places with a sizeable Muslim population in India.
- On the same day, all the companies of Rapid Action Force (RAF) in the state were deployed in Ahmedabad, Godhra, and other areas considered 'sensitive.' CISF (Central Industrial Security Force) units were also deployed. On the same day, the RAF was also sent out in Ahmedabad and other sensitive areas.
- *The Times of India* reported online on February 27 that the Gujarat government had asked the Centre to send ten companies of CRPF which were dispatched.
- Modi himself issued more than one appeal for peace and harmony, which was telecast on Doordarshan on February 27 itself, and repeated

1 Rahul Bedi, "Hindus Massacred in Blazing Train," *The Telegraph*, February 28, 2002, *Web.* http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/1386341/Hindus-massacred-on-blazing-train.html.

on subsequent days. The next chapter analyses how media willfully distorted his statements and speeches.

- On February 27 itself, 217 preventive arrests were made, out of which 137 were Hindus and 80 were Muslims. Nine Hindus were arrested for acts of violence. Despite the fact that several BJP (and many Congress leaders), were actively fomenting trouble, action was ordered against all wrongdoers.
- The district administration was directed to ensure that when the dead bodies from Godhra arrive in their respective native places, keeping in view the likelihood of heightened communal tension, police *bandobast* should be adequate, especially at the time of the funeral. Directions were given that anti-social elements and instigators of communal violence should be dealt with firmly.
- The Central government sounded a nationwide alert in the evening. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Gujarat government appealed to the Hindus not to retaliate and maintain peace.
- The director general and inspector general of Police appeared on Doordarshan in the evening and appealed for peace.
- On February 27 itself, before any major incident of violence was reported, the Gujarat government requisitioned additional para military forces from the home ministry in Delhi through the following:

"MOST IMMEDIATE FAX MESSAGE" NO: (SB.V/ISS/102002/173)
Subsequent to the incident of arson of a railway coach of Sabarmati Express near Godhra railway station today morning, sporadic incidents of violence in the form of stabbing and arson have been reported from Ahmedabad, Baroda, and Anand towns besides Godhra town (.) The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has also given a call for Gujarat bandh on 28.02.2002 (.) The existing resources of state reserve police force have already been deployed fully (.) In order to cope up with the emerging law and order situation during the Gujarat bandh call, ten coys of central para military forces may please be provided immediately even by airlift for law and order duties in addition to the four coys of R.A.F. (.) already requested under fax of even number and date. (J.R. RAJPUT), Under Secretary to Government, Home Department (Spl.)

On his return from Godhra, the chief minister held a late night review meeting with the concerned high-level officers at his residence office to undertake an emergency review of the law and order situation, including officials of Home and Police Departments. To quote Modi:

> That very night I told them to alert the army. I was told the army is at the Jodhpur border on account of Operation Parakram following the Pak inspired attack on the Indian Parliament. The country was facing a war-like situation. Therefore, Gujarat-based army units couldn't be withdrawn from the border. I said, Please explain to them that even if they don't have proper army units, let them send their dhobis, cooks, barbers in the army uniform and take them around in vehicles. The mere presence of men in army uniform has a psychological effect. Ask the army to do at least this much while we make other arrangements. People both respect and fear the army.

All those present at this late night meeting called to assess the preparedness of the government, have confirmed to the SIT that the CM impressed upon them to take all precautionary measures to maintain law and order in the state. In that meeting itself Modi directed his officials to enquire about the availability of the army with the local army headquarters.

Allegations Regarding Provocative Parading of Dead Bodies

While there had been a couple of stray incidents of stabbing on the 27th, the real violence erupted around noon of February 28. It has been alleged that Modi was complicit in the riots because:

- Modi did nothing to ban or stop the *bandh* called by the VHP on February 28 to protest against the Godhra carnage. Its purpose was to provoke riots and the State government took no action.
- The Modi government allowed dead bodies from Godhra to be brought into Ahmedabad and 'paraded around' the city to provoke anti-Muslim sentiments among Hindus, which led to mass violence.
- Modi ordered the police to ignore riotous mobs and let Hindus 'vent their anger' on Muslims to revenge Godhra killings, which in turn are also attributed to Modi.

This issue has been closely examined and dismissed by the SIT, and all the charges found to be baseless. Here is a brief account of the actions taken by the administration:

- The post-mortem was conducted at Godhra hospital itself.
- All the dead bodies that were claimed by relatives at Godhra were handed over in that town itself. Only unidentified bodies and those whose families lived in and around Ahmedabad were sent to Ahmedabad under heavy police escort. The remaining bodies were dispatched under heavy police escort around 3.30 a.m.

- People canot be mobilised for creating a riot at that unearthly hour. Moreover, unlike Civil Hospital, which is situated in the heart of Ahmedabad, and is surrounded by Muslim *bastis*, Sola Hospital is on the outskirts of Ahmedabad where hardly any Muslims lived in those days.
- Since the *karsevaks* had gone to Ayodhya, at the call of VHP leaders, a few of them also followed the police vehicles carrying the dead bodies.
- The bodies of unidentified victims were cremated in a cremation ground right behind Sola Hospital. VHP leaders present at the spot were also asked to convince the relatives of the victims to agree to perform the last rites of those bodies in the nearby cremation ground. However, this proposal led to real outrage among the already angry relatives. They insisted on taking them to their respective homes for proper rites.[2]

This is how Modi explained his decision of why a certain number of dead bodies were brought to Ahmedabad and the precautions taken to avoid worsening of the law and order situation:

> The main Civil Hospital of Ahmedabad where Godhra victims would have arrived in the normal course is in the heart of the city. I used whatever good sense God has given me to order that they be brought to Sola Hospital, which in those days was in the middle of a virtual jungle on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. That area has developed only in the last ten years. Since the train was coming to Sabarmati, the dead bodies that belonged to Ahmedabad had to be brought back to the city. If we had made the relatives of all those killed go and collect their dead bodies from Godhra, thousands would have descended on the already tense town and the situation would have turned more explosive. If the relatives who went to Godhra in a fit of rage had attacked Godhra residents, it would have created more trouble.
>
> So, common sense told us that the dead bodies should be removed from Godhra at the earliest and taken to their homes. We brought them all to Sola Hospital and performed the last rites of nearly 30 unclaimed bodies in the crematorium next to the Sola Hospital.
>
> If anyone were to do an honest investigation, they would find that to handle that explosive situation Gujarat did optimum utilisation of talent, and whatever force was available with us in order to restore peace. One day

2 Uday Mahurkar and Shishir Gupta, "Sins of Modi," *India Today*, March 18, 2002, *Web*. http:// www.indiatoday.com/itoday/20020318/cover.shtml.

> Gujarat may be remembered as a model for handling that explosive situation. Unfortunately, the Gujarat tragedy of 2002 has till date not been seen from the point of view of law and order or from the point of view of justice and social harmony. Instead, it is being exploited for partisan politics and that too with the intention of trapping just one man.

Despite these precautions, fierce riots broke out not just in Ahmedabad but also in several cities, towns and districts of Gujarat because the carnage at Godhra was telecast live on national and local TV channels that entire day. It provoked mass violence on an unprecedented scale. By all accounts, it was a mass upsurge, which was ably exploited by unscruplous politicians of the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, as well as the Congress.

Some Deliberately Ignored Facts

India Today correspondent Uday Mahurkar, who wrote some of the most graphic and insightful reports during those horrific days, told me in a personal interview:

> Rioting did not start in the morning of February 28. Hindus started with pelting of stones on Muslim houses in Naroda Patia area. Muslims also retaliated with stones.
>
> Between 10.30 and 11.00 a.m., an auto driver named Ranjeet Vanjara was parked near a masjid in Naroda Patiya. A group of Muslims dragged him into the gali near their masjid. On seeing this, Hindus began shouting for help. Police came within 20 minutes. When they went in the gali, they found the dead body of Vanzara outside the mosque. His eyes had been gouged. This inflamed the Hindus and they went on a rampage. This case has also been registered in court but no action has taken place over it. No one is giving this case its due attention because it is a case of Hindu killing.
>
> The second incident took place around 11 a.m. A Muslim owner of an Eicher truck was surrounded by a Hindu mob. In panic, he mowed down the crowd. One person was crushed to death. This too enraged the mob and they went on a rampage.
>
> In the third incident in Naroda Gam, a group of Muslims murdered a Hindu cyclist. Thus, the first three persons to be killed in mob violence on February 28 were Hindus. Therefore, the theory that the post-Godhra riots of 2002 were part of a well-crafted BJP conspiracy is all bunkum. Nor were they as one-sided as they came to be projected.

All these three incidents are reported in *India Today*[3] I also confirmed them with the home department of Gujarat government. However, to say that the first three deaths were of Hindus is not at all to justify counter violence—whether in response to Godhra killings or in response to these three murders. No civilised society can live with mob violence as a means of redressing wrongs. Nor is it meant to undermine the fact that enraged Hindu mobs had gathered in numerous places in Gujarat, which are bound to have caused the panic reaction of the kind that led to the mowing down of Hindus by a mobbed Muslim truck driver. The point of listing these three killings is only to highlight the fact that our brazenly partisan human rights activists showed no care or compassion for these and other Hindu victims of violence because their sole agenda was to pillory Modi and project him in a demonic light. Their main agenda is to terrorise the Muslims who had started abandoning the Congress Party into believing that they were unsafe without Congress' "protection."

By all accounts, these riots would have happened in response to the Godhra incident even without these additional provocations on the 28th. The rumour network, as well as live TV coverage of Godhra carnage, had spread the news like wildfire leading to unprecedented mass frenzy. This was the first time that even in tribal districts of Panchmahal, Banaskantha, Sabarkantha, Dahod, etc., there were several murderous outbursts against Muslims.

Army Requisitioned on the First Day of Riots

Around noon on February 28, a law and order review meeting was held at the chief minister's office.

- In this meeting, the CM directed officers to mobilise additional paramilitary force from neighbouring states. The Home Department officials were asked to send a formal requisition letter to the Union government. The Union Home Ministry decided to send 11 companies of the central paramilitary forces by the next day.
- By 2.30 p.m., the chief minister made a telephonic request to the union home minister for army deployment. Withdrawing the army, when a war-like situation existed at the border with Pakistan and Operation

3 Uday Mahurkar, "Naroda Patiya case: Mayaben Kodnani's Fate Hangs in Balance," *India Today*, May 25, 2013, *Web.* http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/naroda-patiya-case-mayaben-kodnani-judgement-narendra-modi-gujarat-riots/1/273065.html.

Parakram was underway involving 'eyeball to eyeball' confrontation following the terror attack on Indian Parliament, needed a high-level decision at the Centre.

- At about the same time, the additional chief secretary (Home) sent an official request to the union defence secretary to make the army available for handling the internal security threat in Gujarat.
- The Cabinet Committee on Security met under the prime minister's chairmanship. It approved the immediate movement of troops to Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat. Vajpayee deputed the then Defence Minister George Fernandes to supervise the deployment of troops.
- At 4 p.m., the chief minister publicly announced the decision of the state government to call in the army. On February 28 itself, Fernandes flew in to Ahmedabad and met Narendra Modi late at night. The next morning, Fernandes was out on the streets and personally oversaw the deployment of armed forces. He visited several riot-affected areas at great personal risk and reviewed the situation personally.
- Army personnel were airlifted to Ahmedabad in 40 aircrafts from the forward positions of the country's border and they started arriving by the midnight of February 28. The first aircraft landed at Ahmedabad by the midnight of February 28 and the last aircraft by 11.00 p.m. on March 1, 2002.
- The deployment of army commenced by 11 a.m. on March 1, 2002. A high-level meeting with the chief minister and the union defence minister along with senior officials of the army and the State administration was also held. In Ahmedabad, a total of nine columns of army were deployed in most of the sensitive areas on March 1 itself.
- The supporting infrastructure and personnel required for the army to act effectively were provided by the State government on a war footing. This included 131 vehicles for their movement. In addition, seven executive magistrates were provided to the army by 7.30 a.m. followed by three more. A total of 32 executive magistrates were made available to the army because it cannot use firepower on its own without orders from an executive magistrate. Mobile phones were provided to the army on the morning of March 1, to facilitate better communication. In addition, liaison officers and escort officers from the police were also provided to the army by the morning of March 1.
- Six aircrafts were used to airlift army personnel to Baroda and the first plane landed at Baroda by 4.30 p.m. on March 1. 14 aircrafts were used

to airlift army to Rajkot and the first one landed in Rajkot by 3 a.m. on March 2, 2002. Two columns of the army were dispatched to Godhra on March 2, and they reached Godhra at 1.30 a.m. on the same day. Two columns of army were moved to Baroda on March 1 at 6.30 p.m. Two columns of army were moved to Rajkot on March 2 at 11 a.m. As incidents of violence were reported from Bhavnagar and Surat, army columns were moved to Surat on March 3 at 11 a.m. and to Bhavnagar at 10.35 p.m.

- Thus, at the peak of deployment, there were 26 army columns in the state.

A chief minister who has orchestrated riots is not likely to have the army brought in with such speed. Similarly, a chief minister who wants a particular community to be massacred is not likely to make desperate pleas for additional police force from neighbouring states

March 1, 2002: Request to Congress States for Help

The following measures on March 1 also do not speak of inaction or indifference by the state administration.

- 568 preventive arrests took place on the second day of riots with 443 Hindus and 125 Muslims taken into custody.
- 695 persons—397 Hindus and 298 Muslims—were arrested for various offences.
- 80 companies of paramilitary forces, including 63 of SRPF and 17 companies of Central Reserve Police Force were deployed.
- The chief secretary gave shoot-at-sight orders wherever necessary.
- 51 persons died in police firing, out of which 24 were Hindus and 27 were Muslims. Whether larger number of Muslims killed on this one day was due to partisan conduct of the police or due to retaliatory violence by Muslims is not clear. But given overall numbers, far more Hindus were arrested and far more died in police firing than Muslims.

In their zeal to condemn Modi, people tend to forget that since it was not a leap year, there were only 28 days in February. Thus actions on 1st March mean the very next day after the outbreak of riots, not with two-three days gap, as would be the case in months with 30 or 31 days.

Congress Ruled States Deny Help

Given the spread of violence, on March 1, 2002, itself, the Gujarat government requested the neighbouring states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh to lend some additional forces.

At that time, all the three states had Congress Party chief ministers—Digvijay Singh in Madhya Pradesh, Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan, and Vilasrao Deshmukh in Maharashtra. The text of the fax is all in capital letters, indicating a sense of urgency. The request sent by fax reads as follows:

> *Sir, as you are aware, the ghastly incident of burning down of 58 passengers in the Sabarmati Express on 27th Feb., 2002 has had serious fallout on the law and order situation in Gujarat. Widespread incidents of arsoning, looting, murder, and other violence have been reported from most parts of the State since yesterday.*
>
> *The State government has been trying its best to utilise all its available resources and has also requested the Government of India to spare additional manpower for maintaining law and order. However, the Government of India is not in a position (sic) to spare more paramilitary forces in view of its commitment elsewhere. As the situation is spreading to villages and major highways are also being blocked, our resources are stretched to the maximum. We feel that the services of additional forces from neighbouring states like yours would help the State Government in handling this precarious law and order situation. We would therefore request you to favourably consider our request for sparing ten companies of your Armed Police to help the Government in handling the law and order situation.* **Signed K. Nityanandam,** Secretary to the Govt of Gujarat, Home Department.

While the Maharashtra government lent some forces, both Digvijay Singh (Madhya Pradesh) and Ashok Gehlot (Rajasthan) refused to come to the aid of Gujarat. It is noteworthy that the government of Madhya Pradesh took 13 days to respond and turn down the request. The exact text of Madhya Pradesh government's response dated March 13, 2002, and marked 'secret' is given below:

> *Please refer to your letter No. SB.V/MMM/102002/769, dated 1st March, 2002 regarding the subject cited matter. It is regretted that due to heavy commitments of MPSAF within the State, it is not possible to spare the force at this moment.* Signed R.C. Arora, Secretary to Government of MP.

Do these letters indicate a sense of urgency on the part of Gujarat chief minister in quelling the riots, or do they portray Narendra Modi as a modern-day "Nero" who paid no heed while Gujarat burned?

It is puzzling why the response of the MP government was marked "SECRET" while the request of Gujarat government for additional police had no such noting. Today, Digvijay Singh is one of the fiercest critics of Modi for his alleged "complicity" in the 2002 riots. However, Digvijay Singh had no answer when Modi reminded him in a meeting of the National Security Council that as CM of Madhya Pradesh he had snubbed the request for additional forces.

March 2, 2002: Peace Committees Activated

As on other days, at a law and order review meeting by the chief minister held in the morning, previous day's developments and actions taken were reviewed and the following developments reported:

- Preventive arrests: 573 (477 Hindus, 96 Muslims)
- Arrests for offences: 711 (482 Hindus, 229 Muslims)
- Died in police firing: 16 (12 Hindus, 4 Muslims)
- 64 companies of SRPF (State Reserve Police Force) and 24 companies of CPMF (Central Para-Military Forces) deployed. A second round of official messages was sent out to the district officials to activate and arrange for holding meetings of District and City Ekta Committees, Peace Committees, and Mohalla Committees and to involve social leaders, prominent members of all communities, and NGOs in the process.
- The chief minister held a law and order review meeting with all senior officers at 8.30 p.m.

March 3, 2002: More Arrests & Police Firings

The chief minister visited Ahmedabad Civil Hospital and toured the city *en route* to the Circuit House and the airport. He also accompanied the Union Home Minister L.K.Advani to Godhra. The following figures speak for themselves:

- Preventive arrests: 363(280 Hindus, 83 Muslims)
- Arrests for offence: 589(416 Hindus, 173 Muslims)
- Killed in police firing: 10 (all Hindus)

Police Failure and Complicity

It was only on March 7, 2002, when the situation seemed to improve markedly, that a decision was taken to send back the army to the barracks on March 10, except in Panchmahal district. However, on account of the

continuing turbulence over the Ayodhya issue and ensuing festivals, the army remained in a standby position. Later, owing to reports of some incidents in Vadodara and Surat, the army was deployed again. On March 15, after reviewing the local situation, the army was used for a flag-march.

Within two days of army deployment, the situation was brought under control. There were stray incidents by agent provocateurs in the next three weeks, but they were not allowed to last long and swiftly prevented from spreading.

Uday Mahurkar provided an overview of the nature of the violence and police response in the fortnightly magazine *India Today* issue dated March 18, 2002:

> That the police was ineffective is clear [on February 28]. But was this intentional? Ahmedabad has a police force of 6,000, including 1,500-armed personnel. In addition, the entire state has just four companies (530 jawans) of the Rapid Action Force (RAF), of which only one company could be spared for Ahmedabad. Considering that the mobs that simultaneously surfaced at nearly half-a-dozen places numbered from 2,000 to 10,000, the forces proved woefully inadequate. At one point, on February 28 there were at least 25,000 people targeting the Muslim localities in Ahmedabad alone.
>
> What's more, the police was expecting trouble in Ahmedabad's walled city, which has been the scene of communal violence in every riot in the past two decades. This time, however, it was not the walled city where the troubles began.
>
> At Naroda Patia, the scene of the worst carnage, there was no police presence worth the name to prevent the mobs from grouping in the morning and going on a rampage. There were at least three mobs of 4,000 to 5,000, each attacking Muslims. Among them were members of a tribe called the Chara, who have a township not very far from Naroda. Till now, the Charas were known for thefts and bootlegging. Last Thursday [i.e.,February 28], they earned a reputation for rioting too.
>
> In Chamanpura area, where nearly 40 persons, including former Congress MP, Ehsan Jafri and his family members were killed, there were just a few armed guards when the crowd began assembling. Reinforcements did arrive, but by that time, the mob had swelled to 10,000 and even though police firing killed at least five persons on the spot—in all police firing led to 40 deaths in Ahmedabad alone—it didn't stop the carnage. The situation was aggravated further by Jafri firing from his revolver on the mob injuring seven. Others in the housing complex are said to have thrown acid bulbs too.

Last Thursday [February 28], the Ahmedabad police received at least 3,500 calls for help from the fear-stricken residents, mostly Muslims, against the normal average of 200. The fire brigade, which has the capacity to handle 100 fire calls, received 400 calls on February 28. Says Ahmedabad Police Commissioner, P.C. Pandey: "In my 32-year career, I have never seen something like this. It was an upsurge, unstoppable, and unprecedented. A stage came when it became physically impossible for the police to tackle mobs running into thousands.: Elsewhere in Gujarat, the problem was broadly similar. The state police force is about 43,000 strong, though only 12,000 of them are armed. The SRP numbers 14,000. The mobs that targeted the Muslims in rural areas, ranged in strength from 500 to 10,000.

Teesta's Right Hand Man Speaks Out

The now-estranged erstwhile colleague of Teesta Setalvad, Rais Khan, who did the entire riot reporting for her organisation from ground zero made similar observations in a video-recorded interview with me:

At that time, I saw the riots first hand. I used to go alone in that jeep. At many places, I saw how mobs gathered in so many places where there was no police. At places, the police contingent was too small to tackle the big mobs that gathered at so many different places. Even in their own FIRs, the victims have mentioned mobs of 10,000 to 15,000. Do you know the total strength of police in Gujarat? At how many places could the police have rescued people simultaneously? Why don't they talk about the role of the army and the paramilitary forces? Why don't they ever talk about how many lives were saved by timely action? Why only talk of those that got killed?

If the police had not assisted the army properly, so many more would have been killed because riots had spread simultaneously in numerous parts of Gujarat. If riots are taking place simultaneously in so many different places—located far away from each other—how can you make the army and police reach each one of these places instantly? The number of policemen in a typical *thana* is very limited. The police can only reach a place after an incident has taken place, as the information reaches them, about mobs gathering at such-and-such places. If at each such place, there is a mob of 10,000 to 15,000 while the local *thana* only has 10-20 policemen, how much can the police do, especially if out of these 20, may be only five have rifles and one has a pistol. They are also human and can be afraid for their own safety when faced with an angry mob! Most policemen only carry a *danda*

(staff). How does such a policeman confront an angry crowd of 10,000 who are pelting stones?

In Delhi, at India Gate, at the time of anti-rape agitation, the police was present in huge numbers while the protestors were no more than a couple of thousand. The police used all techniques barring the use of firepower. Yet, this mob managed to create havoc for the police and even entered the high security President's Estate. By contrast, in Gujarat, the mobs were enraged and out on a killing spree. How could a few policemen bring them all under control at the same time? Both sides were spreading deadly rumours through mobile phones. These rumours were, in large part, responsible for provoking mob violence.

The Hindus as well as Muslims gave vent to their anger. There were many places where Muslims ended up being the vulnerable side while at some other places, the Hindus ended up as the weaker group. You can examine the documents to see for yourself that Hindus too suffered losses at many places. The key difference is that Hindu areas are much larger in size while many of the Muslim neighbourhoods are small and dispersed. A Muslim area might have 500 houses in a couple of lanes surrounded by Hindu neighbourhoods. Even if they try protecting themselves by throwing stones at those who have come to attack them, they are likely to be outnumbered. It would take a while for the police to reach such areas because every lane and road could not possibly have police presence. Even if the police are all set to stop riots, by the time the police reached, some had already lost lives or suffered other losses.

I had submitted photographic evidence of Muslims also attacking Hindu areas. Many Muslims suffered injuries from police firings because they were also attacking Hindus where they could. But Teesta did not publicise that evidence.

If the government had blocked all mobile services, the rumours would not have spread so fast and furious on both sides. The rabid organisations on both sides also need to be kept under control—be it RSS-VHP or the Jamiat-e-Ulema and Jamiat-e-Islami.

Now such elements are not only under control but Gujarat has also become totally peaceful. When the head of the family becomes strict, the kids don't dare misbehave. Because the current head of the family is very strict, there is no trouble in Gujarat. The day the head becomes lax, trouble is bound to erupt again.

Several officials have also told me in long interviews how Modi was caught off-guard because he had neither anticipated such a serious

outburst nor did he have full control over the administration. He had been in office less than four months. In those few weeks, against heavy odds, he had tried to set into motion far-reaching measures of administrative reforms to make the government a genuine instrument of service to citizens. He had not been able to understand the intricacies of the law and order machinery. Yet, he recovered fast and called for the army on the very first day of riots. Consequently, this was among the few large-scale riots in Gujarat, which got put down within three days. During earlier riots, violence would go on and curfew would remain imposed for weeks or even months.

Gujarat Witnessed Riots, Not a Pogrom

As mentioned earlier, had it been a pogrom only Muslims would have died in the disturbances of 2002. Apart from 59 Hindus who died in Godhra, the following data shows that Hindu rioters were not allowed to go scot-free:

- A total of 262 Hindus and 863 Muslims were killed in the riots including those killed in the police firing.
- In the first three days of violence, police firing led to 61 Hindus and 40 Muslims losing their lives.
- Total number of rounds fired by the police: 10,500
- Number of tear gas shells burst: 15,000
- Total number of riot-related accused identified: 25,486 (17,489 Hindus and 7,997 Muslims)
- Total number of accused arrested: 26,997 out of which 19,198 were Hindus.
- The Gujarat police had registered a total of 4,274 cases. As on 31st January , 2012, 246 Hindus and 92 Muslims accused had been convicted.
- It was not really a one-sided mayhem, as portrayed by the Congress and its allies. As early as March 5, 2002, out of the 98 relief camps, 85 were for the Muslims and 13 were for the Hindus. At one point, 40,000 Hindus were living in refugee camps. Moreover, the first serious provocation came from Muslims in the form of Godhra carnage.

We need to ask: why are the self-appointed guardians of minority rights not willing to let these facts come out? Why has a distorted picture of Godhra and post-Godhra riots been put in circulation? In this context, it is noteworthy that when the first part of Nanavati Commission's report was tabled in the Gujarat Assembly on September 25 2008, Teesta

Setalvad's NGO had the gumption to file a petition in the Supreme Court demanding a ban on the publication and circulation of the report on the specious plea that the State government would use it to go soft on the Hindus accused of post-Godhra riots. Teesta also alleged that Modi had appointed pliant judges to the Nanavati Commission to falsely implicate Muslims, conveniently overlooking the fact that Justice Nanavati's name had been proposed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Fortunately, in this case the Supreme Court did not agree to put a ban on the Nanavati Commission report. But, that hasn't stopped the anti-Modi NGOs from peddling the same old lies about Godhra and post-Godhra violence.

The Congress, the Left parties and the NGOs allied to them seem to have acquired a vested interest in inculcating a sense of permanent victimhood and seige mentality among Muslims in order to prey on them as a captive vote bank.

CHAPTER 13

Firm Action against Terrorists & Mafias

Why Modi Drove Congress to Desperation

The Gujarat police has caught narcotics being smuggled in from across the border for distribution in other states through terror networks. Gujarat also exposed a nationwide conspiracy... by nabbing those behind the nefarious attempts to sabotage our national economy through fake currency notes and the racket to print bogus stamp papers. The police also rendered ineffective the criminal gangs of the mafia don Chhota Shakeel by cracking down on their networks. Not only that, we exposed the sinister designs and operations of the banned anti-national organisation SIMI. We arrested over 100 SIMI operatives from all over India who had secretly gathered at Surat.

Because of the firm action taken by my government against anti-national elements, the underworld of Dubai, diverse terrorist organisations, as well as those elements in Gujarat who were providing them protection and shelter, are outraged and fired with the resolve to revenge themselves on Gujarat. This is a very serious matter and we need to demonstrate the capability to face their challenge.

Narendra Modi in Gujarat Assembly in March 2002

In the previous chapters on 'Modi's First 19 weeks as Chief Minister' and 'Modi's First Election in Rajkot', I have described at length how Modi:

- Set a clear development agenda from day one;
- Made no sectional appeals; he talked of five crore Gujaratis on every single occasion after becoming CM; even in his election speeches, his message was always inclusive;
- Won his first election with a substantial Muslim vote with leading Muslim leaders openly defying the Congress Party to campaign for Modi because he had demonstrated his goodwil through concrete

actions while avoiding pandering to unhealthy aspects of identity politics;
- The inclusive and pro-people development model he promised had begun to show results in the Kutch earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation;
- Handled the Godhra carnage with quiet calm and determination, contrary to false propaganda that he used the tragedy to engineer riots;
- Brought in the army to quell the violence with a firm hand and brought the riots under control within 72 hours, despite sections of BJP and Congress pouring oil on troubled waters;

It stands to reason that a chief minister, who was doing all he could to prioritise development issues and governance reforms from day one, did not need to, and would not want to derail his own good work by instigating riots and destabilising his own state.

The least acknowledged reason for the Congress Party's panic at Modi's rise to power was the swift and determined action Modi began taking not only against land grabbers and other law breakers, but also against criminal mafias abetting cross-border terrorism. It is widely alleged by Gujarati Muslims that the Congress Party's Muslim vote bank was kept safe by its patronage of *bhai log* and Muslim dons, some of whom were also involved in cross-border terrorism assisting ISI-linked terror networks.

The following extract from Modi's speech, in the March 2002 Assembly session, takes head on this key issue which threatened the Congress Party's political hegemony:

> On October 2, 2001, you all had chosen me as the leader of the house. At the time of taking over the reins of government I said that since Gujarat is a border state, it has to be specially alert and awake... I had clearly indicated that people with anti-national tendencies and agendas, who have thus treated Gujarat as a safe haven, better realise that they will not get an opportunity to play their fiery sinister games from the land of Gujarat.
>
> In the last five-six months my government has taken concrete steps to crack down on cross-border terrorists and anti-national elements operating with evil motives to promote seditious activities. We have also taken strict measures against criminal mafias who are threatening the internal security of the state. They are spreading terror in Gujarat even from their bases in the other states. The steps we have taken have produced concrete results. I want to provide some important examples of that. From Patan alone, AK-47s, magazines,

pistols, about 100 rounds of ammunition, RDX, radio sets, remote control systems, etc. were confiscated within one week of my assuming office. Such anti-national elements understood that the government has started taking strict actions against them. On December 17, 2001, pistols, rocket-launchers, RDX, hand grenades, rifles, and other war ammunition were caught from the same place. They again got the message that the reins of power are now in the hands of people who will not spare them anymore.

Thereafter, M. Shahnawaz of Lashkar-e-Taiyyaba was arrested by the BJP government. After his arrest, AK-56 rifles, ammunition for magazines, cartridges, and more than twenty kilograms of RDX were confiscated. All these seized explosives had the power to blow up five Gandhinagars. We also seized detonators and imported remote controls with the latest technology (for setting off blasts).

From Navsari district, the maulvi of Dabhel madrasa was arrested with deadly artilleries and explosives, sensitive maps, and objectionable literature. We cannot let this incident pass off as a routine matter. Similarly, Ashraf of Jaish-e-Mohammad was arrested, and Asif Raza Khan was killed. They were all anti-national elements and part of international crime syndicates involved in criminal conspiracies through terrorist organisations like Hizbul Mujahiddin and Jaish-i-Mohammad. They were getting arms and ammunitions including bombs, RDX, and other weapons of mass killings for lanching terrorist attacks and other subversive activities with the help of those terrorist outfits.

After these incidents, the Dubai underworld began to discuss and explore ways of remaining active while keeping Gujarat police at bay. That is why they went and attacked the American Centre in Kolkata. They also openly threatened to destroy Gujarat. This is a very serious chain of events. They declared in Kolkata, as well as from Dubai, that they would take revenge on Gujarat by inflicting deadly destruction in the state.

These are not ordinary threats. Terrorism has many forms and faces. The Gujarat police has caught narcotics being smuggled in from across the border for distribution in other states through terror networks. Gujarat also exposed a nationwide conspiracy by nabbing those behind the nefarious attempts to sabotage our national economy through fake currency notes and the racket to print bogus stamp papers. The police also rendered ineffective the criminal gangs of the mafia don Chhota Shakeel by cracking down on their networks. Not only that, we exposed the sinister designs and operations of the banned anti-national organisation SIMI. We arrested over 100 SIMI operatives from all over India who had secretly gathered at Surat. These people are now locked up behind bars.

Because of the firm action taken by my government against anti-national elements, the underworld of Dubai, diverse terrorist organisations, as well as those elements in Gujarat who were providing them protection and shelter, are outraged and fired with the resolve to revenge themselves on Gujarat. This is a very serious matter and we need to demonstrate the capability to face their challenge.

The Gujarat police are risking their lives while performing their duty of nabbing such elements. At such a time, instead of boosting their morale by appreciating their work, the entire Police Department is being demoralised through all out attacks. What is the reason behind this attempt to destroy their morale? This is the same Gujarat police, which worked with those of you sitting in the opposition today. Why these attempts to tar them with political colours?

I'm not talking only about what is happening in this House where efforts to settle political scores are likely to continue. But I'm worried about its larger implications. The Gujarat police have taken several steps one after another in the interest of national security at the risk of their own lives.

They have plugged many loopholes which is why all those elements who are feeling threatened are pressing all the buttons within their reach to tar the entire police department as part of a well-organised conspiracy. The issue is not limited to Godhra or post-Godhra incidents. It is an organised attempt to demoralise the entire police machinery at a time when we should rise above machinations of party politics and appreciate and strengthen the efforts of those who are staking their lives for the security of Gujarat.

Some over-enthusiastic people are even instigating government officers to settle their old scores with police officers. They are filing petitions in order to get revenge on select police officers. I do not speak under the influence of emotions. I want to state it with responsibility and respect for the dignity of the House that there is no need to point fingers at any police or government official for the incidents at Godhra or those that followed the Godhra massacre. Nor is there any need to defame them. If you think certain crimes have been committed. I'm willing to take all those crimes on my own head. And if they want to see them hanged, I'm willing to be the one to go to the gallows. But I am committed to protecting government officials because they have produced fruitful results for restoring peace in Gujarat.

Political combat *(daanv pech)* has its own place. But we should not act in ways that demoralises those are serving society by performing their jobs well.

In keeping with his overall approach of taking full responsibility for whatever happened in the state, instead of looking for scapegoats, Modi defended the police not because he wanted to protect the guilty or incompetent among them, but because he understood that an all-out attack would make the police even more dysfunctional and disoriented. The Kargil war, and the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament by ISI-trained terrorists were all recent history.

As a border state with a long history of communal violence, smuggling mafias, and international crime syndicates, Gujarat couldn't afford to have a more demoralised police. Even the urgently required process of police reforms to make it more accountable and citzen-friendly, rather than a source of terror and tyranny, needed supporting the best among them, marginalising the wrong doers and lawless cops and inculcating more self-esteem in them. An all-out attack demoralises even good officers, and scape-goating a few officers when the police force is heavily criminalised only makes the force close ranks and sabotage all attempts at reform.

Modi admits that reorienting the police has been the most difficult, risky, and challenging of all tasks. But it is work in progress. The Gujarat police is today way ahead of other states in terms of crime control as well as public dealings. The police stations in Gujarat, even in remote areas, are far better equipped and organised than in most states of India. They even look more citizen-friendly.

But far from supporting Modi's efforts at police reform, the Congress Party which always had a very cosy relation with the worst among the Gujarat police officers went ballistic against it as though Modi had brought in new recruits from some other planet. Just as they rose in defense of those who were found guilty of roasting alive train passengers at Godhra, the Congress Party has since then defended and made national heroes out of rogue officers of Gujarat police simply because they went against Modi and made common cause with anti-Modi NGOs.[1] The Congress

1 For details of two such officers, Sanjiv Bhatt and RB Sreekumar, see: Madhu P. Kishwar, "Heroes of the Secular Brigade: A Glimpse into the Misdoings of Sanjiv Bhatt," Manushi, May 2, 2013, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1703&ptype=campaigns&pgno=1#.Uvya3kKSxJM; and,
"RB Shreekumar: Hero No. 2 of Secular Brigade - Part I," Post Godhra Gujarat and Modinama, November 16, 2013, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1730&ptype=campaigns#.UvybEkKSxJM.

Party has defended even well-known terrorists as though they were the most sacred symbols of Islam and messiahs of the Muslim community. Hundreds of encounter killings have taken place in recent years in all Congress-ruled states as well as in those ruled by Congress allies such as Nitish Kumar of Bihar, Omar Abdullah in J&K, and Akhilesh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh. But the only encounter killings Congress has taken to heart are those that led to killing of known terrorists like Sohrabuddin, Javed Sheikh, Zeeshan Johar, and Amjad Ali Rana who have been openly owned up by Pakistani terror outfits.

The Congress is alleged to have provided the best of lawyers to the families of these terrorists, while at the same time gunning for Amit Shah, under whose tenure as home minister these encounter killings took place. The real target is Modi, not Shah because the Congress has built a case that these allegedly false encounter killings were ordered by Modi. This despite the fact that the killings took place with the active involvement of the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India which provided inputs to the Gujarat police that these people were on a terror mission to the state.

Never before in India, has a home minister been jailed for encounter killings of criminals or terrorists by the police, as was Amit Shah. This is not at all to justify false encounter killings even of dreaded terrorists. When a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court to demand that all the cases of encounter killings that had reached the National Human Rights Commission be reopened and examined like the six allegedly false encounter killings of Gujarat in Modi's regime, the UPA government filed an affidavit in court blocking the move on the ground that it would "compromise national security!" Recently, when the CBI, the famed 'caged parrot' of UPA government demonstrated small signs of independence and gave a clean chit to Amit Shah saying the Congress would have been happy had Amit Shah been implicated, Congress politicians charged the CBI of having been bought over by Modi!

Till very recently, encounter specialists in Congress-ruled states were lionised, given rewards, and projected as popular heroes. Consequently, several Bollywood films were made romanticising and glorifying their acts. It is also noteworthy that neither the Congress nor the NGOs allied to it make much of the encounter killing of a Hindu mafia don Prajapati by same officers of the Gujarat police.

CHAPTER 14

Who Kept the Pot Boiling?
Four Phases of Post-Godhra Riots

After meeting Mr Modi, I was moved by his sincerity. I found him to be fair and sincere in terms of his intention to end the riots. He seemed worried and sad because his police had failed him in ending this violence; he wanted me to take whatever steps I deemed fit to end this violence and assured me whole-hearted support… I realised that people of all political parties, who were anti-Modi and anti-BJP, were taking advantage of this mayhem and making all efforts to defame Modi one way or the other.
K.P.S. Gill, Central Government appointed special advisor to Gujarat CM, May 2002

...Among other factors, Modi's belonging to the OBC caste worked against him. Gujarat had a well-established tradition that only a Patel can be chief minister. Since he was sent as a replacement for Keshubhai Patel, those close to Keshubhai were determined to bring him down. Some Muslim leaders also joined hands and instigated their community.
A.I. Sayed, former ADG Gujarat Police

Though the Congress never tires of tarnishing the BJP as a "communal" and "minority-hating party" in reality, its regimes witnessed a series of caste and communal riots to polarise vote banks in its favour. They refuse to come to terms with the fact that this divisive politics stopped working in Gujarat after March 2002. The following account describes actions taken by the Modi's government to quell violence and the doings of Modi's opponents.

There are four distinct phases in the way violence erupted and played itself out during the 2002 Gujarat riots. An analysis of the timing of violent outbreaks and their trigger points indicates a very different sinister plot and pattern than the one peddled by the media thus far:

The first phase of violence that began on February 28, 2002 and lasted until March 3, 2002 was characterised by anti-social politicians of all hues exploiting mass outrage against the Muslim community for the Godhra train burning. However, the worst was over in 72 hours due to a swift deployment of the army. By mid-March, the situation started cooling down. Schools, colleges, and other institutions had started functioning normally.

The second phase of stray incidents of violence, from March 18 to March 28, was part of a deliberate strategy by politically-patronised miscreants to disrupt the board examinations at various centres, which started from March 18, 2002. This was done to keep the pot boiling.

The third phase, starting April 17, was again engineered by miscreants, on the eve of the second phase of board examinations, to subvert return to normalcy conditions so that the world could be told that Modi was unwilling and incapable of controlling the violence. But Modi's government was by now wiser and did not allow these incidents to escalate as happened on February 28 when it was caught off guard.

The fourth phase of violence starting May 5 saw attacks on Hindu neighbourhoods by mischief mongers with the intent of provoking a backlash. The idea was to influence the scheduled discussion on Gujarat in the concluding session of Rajya Sabha the next day.

These stage-managed riots were aimed at misleading the Parliament, as well as the outside world, to believe that the situation in Gujarat was grim and to build a national hysteria around Narendra Modi in order to browbeat Prime Minister Vajpayee into sacking Modi.

However, the target was not just Narendra Modi—the target was as much Atal Bihari Vajpayee because, as the widely acknowledged "liberal face" of BJP, Vajpayee had been able to end the political isolation of BJP by attracting a wide range of allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), thus making Congress Party's prospect of returning to power very bleak. Vajpayee was not only a popular mass leader, but was also able to inject new life in the economy by his agenda of liberalisation. The political legitimacy of Vajpayee's NDA government had to be destroyed in order to combat its growing popularity. The Congress Party desperately needed communal riots in BJP-ruled states, especially Gujarat, as a peg to build hysteria around the alleged demonic, anti-minority image of the BJP and force BJP's self styled 'secular' allies like the Trinamool Congress, Biju Janata Dal, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and the Janata Dal (United) to withdraw their support and declare BJP untouchable.

This strategy worked perfectly since the TDP, BJD, Trinamool left the NDA alliance to keep face with their Muslim voters. That helped Sonia Congress in dethroning Vajpayee in 2004. Even though by all accounts and yardsticks, Vajpayee led NDA government treated its regional allies with far greater courtesy and consideration than the Congress has ever done, the Gujarat riots became a convenient handle to manipulate NDA's "secular" allies to shun and isolate BJP. It was once again stigmatised as a a political "untouchable" by the very same allies who merrily climbed on the NDA bandwagon when BJP was voted in as the largest party in 1999. As a result Vajpayee lost power but Modi survived because he understood the game better than the central leadership of BJP, including Vajpayee.

The following account shows how the Congress Party used all possible means to keep the pot boiling in order to create countrywide hysteria against the BJP government in Gujarat.

The First and Most Intense Phase of the Gujarat Riots

As described in an earlier chapter, during the first phase of riots starting February 28, 2002, politicians of both the BJP and the Congress fueled the mob frenzy. People forgot their party affiliations and decided to take revenge on Muslims. In this mad fury, innocent Muslims became hapless targets. However, thanks to the speedy deployment of the army and additional para-military forces, it was brought under control within 72 hours. From March 3 to 5, there were occasional outbursts of violence.

- Out of the total 1,129 deaths attributed to the 2002 riots, 611 had occurred during one-week starting February 28.
- Out of the total of 199 deaths due to police firing, 101 occurred during this period.
- Around 5,450 out of a total 10,000 rounds of firing also took place during these three days.
- The deaths reported on March 4, 5, and 6 mainly consisted of the dead bodies recovered on account of the violence up to March 3.

There were plenty of cases of police complicity, and/or inadequacy, in dealing with the situation during this period, which witnessed the most horrific episodes of violence. But it also saw tough police action. The very fact that 101 persons died in police firing in the same period indicates that the police was not altogether complicit or put out of action. It is worth noting that, of those killed in police firing, 61 were Hindus and 40 were Muslims. There are hardly any other examples of people of the

majority community being killed in such large numbers during riots in other states of India.

2nd Phase of Violence: Govt. Ensures Safety of Haj Pilgrims

It was during this phase that each of the 6,000 pilgrims returning from Haj were received by the Gujarat police at the point of entry, and each individual and family escorted safely to their respective doorstep in 400 different locations across towns and villages of Gujarat. During Modi's election campaign, Muslim leaders of Rajkot had expressed gratitude to the new CM for making better arrangements for Haj pilgrims than the Congress had ever done. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, one of the first instructions from Modi's office after the outbreak of riots was to direct the police to ensure the safety of the 6,000 Muslim pilgrims that had gone to Haj from Gujarat. This is how *The Times of India* reported the matter on March 20, 2002:

> The first lot of 287 haj pilgrims from Gujarat returned home after their nearly 55-day-long trip concluded on Tuesday. About 150-armed policemen were deployed for their security. According to Deputy Commissioner of Police, Pravin Gondia, arrangements have been made for the safe transit of the passengers from the airport to their various destinations in 19 districts. As the Saudi flight, SV 5418, arrived here from the Jeddah at 4 p.m., a heavy security set-up was seen outside the arrival lounge with nearly 200-armed men guarding the fortified arrival area at the international terminal. Speaking to reporters at the airport, Haj Committee Chairman, S.K. Saiyad, said that satisfactory transportation facility along with escorts had been provided. Heavily armed escort parties waited to accompany the passengers. Four Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation buses were deployed to escort the passengers.

The State government also ensured that Muharram and Holi passed off peacefully thanks to precautionary measures. In earlier years these festivals often triggered off communal clashes. Enough forces were deployed, and adequate precautionary measures were taken, to ensure that the miscreants did not get the opportunity to cause trouble on these sensitive occasions. Panchayat elections in different parts of the state were held peacefully in thousands of villages.

After observing that the state had been more or less incident-free for 15 days, and that the situation had stabilised, the State government

decided to go ahead with the secondary and higher secondary board examinations. Elaborate security arrangements were made for the safe conduct of the exams. The government requisitioned buses to escort students from exam centres to their homes. Police escorts were provided to the vehicles carrying students.

However, key sections of the Congress Party and its allied organisations opposed the holding of exams tooth and nail, as though it was being done to spite the Muslim community. They used the pretense that Muslim children would be unable to appear in the exams because the whole community was terrorised. The government argued that, out of the 469 police districts, only 163 districts had experienced riots. Even during the peak of the riots, only 95 police districts had been directly affected. Postponing exams would mean lakhs of students all over the state losing a whole year. That frustration would also prevent young people from getting back to normal routine. But the anti-Modi lobbies would not yield.

So desperate were the Congress Party and its allied NGO allies in preventing the return of normalcy that they approached the High Court to get a stay order on the holding of exams—totally unmindful of the unsettling effect it would have on the minds of the young people who would lose a whole year. However, after reviewing government arrangements, the High Court ruled that it found them adequate. Therefore, a stay order was not granted.

The first phase of examinations started from March 18, except in the Police Commissionerate areas of Ahmedabad and Vadodara cities. But in order to disrupt exams, miscreants were let loose to instigate group clashes, arson, and killings. As reported in *The Times of India* on March 20, 2002, the second phase of violence was confined to the walled city of Ahmedabad, Bharuch, Godhra, Modasa, and Himmat Nagar. An indefinite curfew was clamped in the Himmat Nagar town of Sabarkantha district, following incidents of stone pelting and arson. The police burst teargas shells to disperse a mob, as tension mounted in the town following rumours.

The Hindu reported on March 20, 2002 that, following the violence, an indefinite curfew has been clamped in both Bharuch and Modasa, which also forced the authorities to postpone the ongoing secondary and higher secondary examinations in these towns, in addition to Ahmedabad and Baroda where they were postponed earlier in view of the disturbed conditions.

Riots also spread to the neighbouring areas. *The Times of India* reported on March 22, 2002, that there was tension in Himmat Nagar following the violence in neighbouring Modasa, where two people were killed on Tuesday. The situation worsened after the son of a Kutchi Patel, who had come shopping, apparently got lost. A resident said, "The local VHP and BJP members blamed the minority community. They had given a deadline of 2 p.m. to the police to fetch the boy." Eyewitnesses said a group of more than 1,500 people had surrounded the police station demanding the recovery of the boy". Soon arson and violence broke out and the exams had to be cancelled. However, despite determined efforts of the saboteurs, the situation was swiftly brought under control. The rest of the state, in any case, stayed peaceful and therefore, in most parts of the state the board exams were completed smoothly.

Violence stoked to influence the NHRC team: These incidents were orchestrated keeping in view the visit of Justice Verma, the chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to Gujarat. Fresh violence erupted the day he went to Godhra. This was in addition to incidents in Ahmedabad. Manas Dasgupta reported in *The Hindu* on March 22, 2002:

> At least seven persons were killed, five in police firing and two in stabbing incidents, as violence erupted once again in Ahmedabad since this afternoon, even as most parts of Gujarat remained peaceful today. An indefinite curfew was re-clamped in Kalupur, Dariapur, Shahpur and Karanj police station areas in the evening after at least six incidents of stabbing, large-scale arson, and stone throwing were reported from various areas affected in renewed violence. Curfew had been withdrawn from these areas only yesterday….the army was again called out for a flag march and the security further strengthened…. At least 100 shops were destroyed in the Sindhi market area when a mob set them on fire this afternoon following reports of stabbings….The police were forced to open fire near Sakaria-ni-Pole in Kalupur area following a pitched battle between people of two communities in which one person was killed on the spot.

Those who engineered these disturbances had a clear agenda—to convey to the NHRC team that Gujarat was still burning and Narendra Modi was the key culprit. Any strictures on Narendra Modi by the NHRC lent great legitimacy to their oust-Modi campaign. As long as the NHRC team

stayed in Gujarat, stray incidents of violence, arson, and stone pelting continued in parts of Ahmedabad, Godhra, and Vadodra with rumours 'circulating like wild fire'. *The Times of India* reported on March 24, 2002:

> Even as a NHRC team camped in the city and toured Godhra, fresh violence erupted here on Friday leaving three dead and at least two injured. Curfew was imposed in six police station precincts of the city. …Following the incidents of stabbing, people had started coming out on the streets and large mobs had gathered in the walled city areas. Minor incidents of altercations between people of different communities were also reported.

Government ensures peaceful Muharram and Holi: Despite all this mischief, the government ensured that no untoward incident was reported on March 25, 2002, namely the day of Muharram. This was mainly due to strict police *bandobast*. In earlier years, riots on Muharram were common. On March 29, 2002, *The Hindu* reported, "The Gujarat government is not taking any chances for the Holi festival tomorrow. Even as sporadic violence continued, the situation had become tense in view of the festival and the provocative leaflets that are making the rounds instigating people to violence 'to save Gujarat.' A high alert is being maintained in all sensitive areas…"

The Times of India, on March 29, 2002, also reported that "while no extra reinforcements had been called for, the army and the BSF patrolled Ahmedabad continuously on Holi. A day before, the army conducted a flag march in Sarkhej where trouble broke out following incidents of arson…" Gujarat celebrated a very low-key, but peaceful, Holi with no untoward incident of violence reported anywhere. However, political miscreants continued to spread sinister rumours to instigate communal clashes and rumours cannot be controlled by deploying police or arresting people**.**

Manas Dasgupta reported in *The Hindu* on April 2, 2002, "The Police Commissioner, P.C. Pandey, who attributed the renewed violence to 'rumour mongering', said that the police was devising new methods to curb unruly mobs from coming out on the streets and creating panic among rival communities…. mobile vans, fitted with video cameras, would move round the city and film the mobs to identify the mischief-mongers in case of any untoward incidents…"

Laying siege to PM Vajpayee: Barely a day before the prime minister's visit to Gujarat, bizarre incidents of violence flared up in the state with

people being burnt alive in different areas. On April 3, 2002, *The Hindu* reported that the Vadodara Police Commissioner Deen Dayal Tuteja, was injured when miscreants hurled a petrol bomb at him. In another incident, police opened fire in Ankleshwar in south Gujarat following stone-throwing, while tension also prevailed in Adipur-Gandhidham in Kutch district. *The Times of India* reported on April 3, 2002, on the anxiety of the state administration prior to the PM's visit, "The fresh spate of violence in Gujarat, especially in the Kutch region, which has so far escaped communal frenzy, on the eve of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's arrival has shaken the state administration, even as authorities were geared up for the visit..."

The Hindu reported on April 4, 2002, that at least nine persons were killed in violent incidents on the eve of Vajpayee's visit. Six of them were burnt alive in Abasana village in Ahmedabad district. The method behind this madness was clear: present such a fearsome picture to Vajpayee that he would be compelled to sack Modi. But in these later phases, the State government does not seem to have faltered in taking action.

On April 7, 2002, *The Hindu* reported, "The police had sought the army's assistance to quell disturbances at Ghodasar where a mob attacked some housing colonies, threw petrol bombs and burning rags after cutting off power supply. Police fired 80 rounds killing two persons and burst scores of teargas shells to disperse the mob…Police have arrested 25 persons in connection with the burning alive of five persons of a minority family in Abasana village under the Detroj police station in Ahmedabad district on April 3…."

Panchayat elections held peacefully: Undeterred by these subversions, Modi continued to focus on getting people's energies directed towards constructive politics. Therefore, he made sure that panchayat elections were held as per the announced schedule. This was in sharp contrast to how several chief ministers in India have used "disturbed conditions" as an alibi for indefinitely avoiding holding of panchayat elections because that gives them scope for concentrating all power in the state capital.

The Hindu, on April 8, 2002, carried the following report about polling in panchayat elections: "A government spokesman cited the peaceful polling in some 1,060 village panchayat elections as an indicator of peace and normality returning to the state. An estimated 55 to 60 per cent of the electorate cast their votes in the elections to the village panchayats, which could not go to the polls in December for various reasons. The

polling was scheduled to be held [in March] but had to be postponed due to the violence."

With the law and order improving, the State Secondary and Higher Secondary Examination Board recommended that the second phase of the secondary and higher secondary examinations be held any time after April 14.

The Third Phase of Engineered Violence

Following the decision of the government to hold the second phase of the board examinations from April 18 onwards, several Muslim organisations, with the support of anti-Modi NGOs, gave a call to Muslim students to boycott examinations. But the students defied their boycott call despite threats of violence. *The Times of India* reported on April 17, 2002:

> Citing 'unsafe' centres for secondary board examinations starting on April 18, a Muslim group on Tuesday night asked students belonging to the community to boycott the exams for class X and XII even as Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi assured them of adequate security. A meeting held here under the aegis of 'affected citizens of Ahmedabad' resolved that the 'minority community shall not participate in the class X and class XII exams beginning from April 18.'...the minority community shall not participate in the examinations... Meanwhile Chief Minister Modi appealed to the students to appear for the examinations 'without any tension.' He said strict action will be taken against those who would try to disrupt the examinations.

Muslim students defy exam boycott call: The government relaxed rules for students coming from disturbed areas to facilitate their taking the exams. Examination centres were earmarked to students on a need basis; late entries in the examination were allowed, and students who had lost their entry slips were also allowed. In addition, elaborate security arrangements were made for students' safety at exam centres as well as for their travel to and from exam halls by providing buses with police escort. Manas Dasgupta reported in *The Hindu* on April 20, 2002:

> The efforts of the Gujarat government as also of the Defence Minister George Fernandes, yielded better results today with more students belonging to the Muslim community appearing for the on-going secondary and higher secondary examinations in the state.

> The large-scale attendance of Muslim students showed an immediate improvement in the overall percentage of attendance in the examinations. An official spokesman said the attendance increased from 93 per cent on Thursday to 96.16 per cent today, marginally less than the normal presence of about 98 per cent. Encouraged by the Chief Minister Narendra Modi's assurance, more Muslim parents have agreed to send their wards for the examinations. Mr. Modi's assurance, that the students who missed the examinations in the last two days due to security concerns would be given another chance, has boosted the morale of the minority students. Officials of the Education Department visited the relief camps housing the riot-hit Muslims and Muslim-dominated areas. They reassured the parents about security for their wards. Mr. Fernandes, who arrived in Ahmedabad on Thursday night for a four-day visit to the riot-hit areas in the state, visited a couple of examination centres to review the security aspects and spoke to students. His request to the parents met with instant response.

This is what Modi had to say about the harassment he faced from those determined to disrupt exams:

> Even though we made fool-proof arrangements to hold the annual board exams peacefully, these NGOs and the Congress Party created endless obstructions. But the courts came to our rescue. I had assured them that I was willing to hold separate exams for those who, for some reason, were unable to appear as per schedule. But they should not make lakhs of students in the entire state lose one year. But they wouldn't budge. We had organised special tuitions in relief camps by setting up separate tents for holding classes for board students with regular power supply. Teachers and doctors went regularly to the relief camps; I ensured that the officer in-charge of each area, where relief camps were situated, was a Muslim to give them a sense of assurance.
>
> The media joined the chorus that students were not willing to appear for exams and were boycotting them. They even produced a picture or two showing empty classroom benches to project that students were keeping away from exams. But the truth is that the attendance was a bit higher, not lower, than normal. Congress Party workers, some Muslim organisations, and NGOs used to actively stop students from reaching exam centres. Some of these NGO activists were so desperate in dissuading Muslim students from appearing in exams that they went around forcing Muslim kids out of buses that had gone

to pick them up for exams. So much so they even burnt a bus, which had come to collect students in a Muslim *basti*.

They had to do this to prove to the High Court that their stand was right since they had filed a petition to get a stay order on exams. But when the High Court reviewed our arrangements, they found them satisfactory. Therefore, they did not give a stay order on holding the board exams. Despite so much pressure from all these disruptive elements, Muslim children performed well. The average attendance was 98 per cent; Muslim students secured even better results that year. Normally, the success rate of Muslim students used to be 60 per cent; that year it went up to 75. But these NGOs wanted to keep only one rant going: Muslims are dying; they are being crushed and killed.

As the situation began to normalise, the Chief of the Army Staff, S. Padmanabhan, told the media that it was time to pull out the army from Gujarat. But then a new round of disturbances started as though on cue.

Deliberate disruptions on Ram Navami: When the examinations had started smoothly, Ahmedabad witnessed another round of stage-managed violent clashes on April 21, 2002, the day of Ram Navami. Similar disruptions were instigated at Kadi in district Mehsana. Such incidents on an important festival were clearly aimed at provoking Hindus. The timing also betrayed their real purpose. The Parliament was scheduled to resume its session on April 22. This fresh outbreak of violence provided much-needed ammunition to the Congress and the Left parties to go ballistic against the Vajpayee government at the Centre and Modi's government in Gujarat. On April 22, *The Times of India* wrote:

A fresh spate of violence gripped Gujarat on Sunday, leaving as many as 13 dead even as the Union Defence Minister George Fernandes was on a 'healing mission' to the state. The dead include both Hindus and Muslims. A policeman was among the 12 killed in Ahmedabad on Sunday that marked Ram Navami, as violence spread in the sensitive areas of the city, besides neighbouring Kheda, Vadodara, and Mehsana districts.

One person died in police firing on Saturday night in Kapadvanj area of Kheda district. Violence rocked Gomtipur area of Ahmedabad on Sunday as a constable died of sword injuries and a person was killed in an explosion. Eight others, including a woman, fell to police bullets, as tension refused to subside in the city. The rioting mobs also set on fire a police post at Hardasnagar in the Bapunagar area.

The report goes on to say that, according to the police, a *Ramdhun* programme was disrupted by a group who allegedly pelted stones at devotees, which provoked the reaction. Police fired at least 60 rounds in which seven people were injured. The BSF and the RAF had also been called in. The police arrested 74 persons in connection with the disturbance. Indefinite curfew was imposed in disturbed areas of Ahmedabad as mobs refused to disperse following bouts of stone-throwing, arson, private firing, and crude explosions that had begun on Saturday night. Mobs set on fire the Nagpur Vohra Ni Chaali and then stopped the fire fighters from reaching the place on Saturday night. Police opened fire on the rioters. Arson and violence continued to spread to other adjoining areas as the army was called in to take control of the situation on Sunday. A constable, Amar Suresh Rao Patil, who was on law and order duty in the area, was killed after being attacked by a sharp weapon.

Even though the report wisely does not name communities, reading between the lines one can gather that Muslims are not just victims, they are also among the aggressors in several areas. However, the tribals were always identified whenever they went on rampage. For instance, the same report mentions that there were various outbursts in Vadodra district, including in Chhota Udaipur, "where tribals armed with bows and arrows reportedly went on the offensive, but were checked by the police." *The Hindu* reported on April 23, 2002:

> The Army, which had returned to the barracks in the cantonment area in Ahmedabad, was back on the streets, staging flag-marches in the violence-hit areas, along with the Rapid Action Force personnel and police. The renewed violence had its impact on the ongoing secondary and higher secondary examinations, which were held under tight security...
>
> The State Congress President, Amarsinh Chaudhary, favouring continuation of the examinations, took a serious view of some of his party colleagues joining hands with minority leaders to give a call to the students to boycott the examinations. Talking to media persons here today, Mr. Chaudhary said he would seek an explanation from those who were believed to have supported the boycott call.

Congress Double Speak on Examination Boycott

Though, the former Congress CM is quoted in newspapers saying that Congressmen were complicit in the exam boycott call to foment trouble;

in the assembly, the same Amarsinh Chaudhary attacked Narendra Modi for having pushed through the exams on terrorised Muslim students. Modi did not mince words in reminding the Congress leader of his double-speak:

> Sh. Amarsinh gave a big sermon on examinations. I do not wish to go into the figures he mentioned. But I do want to read out a fax received by the state government which says, "It was the right move to hold the examinations as per schedule in order to safeguard the interests of students despite disturbed conditions in the state." It further says, "Even in our disturbed tribal areas like Chhota Udaipur and Kwat, exams are being conducted in a well-organised manner. We are happy about this." This fax has come from Shri Sukhrambhai Rathwa, respected MLA of the Indian National Congress from Chhota Udaipur. The letter carries the signature of several people from the area.
>
> All these years, the average figure for students appearing in exams used to be 97 to 98 per cent. I say it with pride that today, wherever exams are being held, 98 per cent of students are appearing for them. Some people are upset because the violence was brought under control in three days. Some have resolved not to let the government take credit for controlling riots within 72 hours. Therefore, they are determined to show that they can continue the mayhem for 72 days. Those who harbour such dreams are making a mistake. Their dreams will not be fulfilled. This government is determined to take firm steps to establish peace.

In spite of efforts at sabotage, the second phase of the board examinations went on without interruption from April 18, 2002, onwards. However, stray incidents erupting in the most unlikely places kept the administration on tenterhooks. *The Hindu* reported on April 26, 2002: "For the first time in two months, the Saurashtra region, which was relatively insulated from violence, witnessed disturbances since Wednesday night....The miscreants also attacked two temples and damaged the idols. This led to a pitched battle between the rival groups, forcing the police to open fire in which six persons were injured…"

Despite determined attempts at preventing return of normalcy by the opposition, once again, the government took special care of Muslim students who were unable to appear for the exams after the orchestrated violence. It announced that supplementary examinations would be held in Ahmedabad and Baroda for the students who missed the April test.

The Times of India wrote on April 27, 2002: "The Government's Counsel Solicitor General Harish Salve and Additional Solicitor General Kirit Raval assured the court that even those students who had taken the examination would be allowed to appear in the repeat test, provided they gave an undertaking that marks scored by them in the April test would be forfeited…"

But violence broke out yet again in Vadodara, where at least two persons were killed and 19 injured. *The Hindu* reported on April 28, 2002, "In the Vadi locality people from the rival communities came out on the streets late last night and hurled stones and bombs at each other. Police said there was no immediate provocation for the disturbances and the violence could be the handiwork of gangs of criminals from the two communities."

The Fourth Phase of Disturbances

The fourth phase starting May 5 saw even more aggression by rogue elements propped up to attack Hindu localities, with the clear intention of triggering large-scale Hindu-Muslim riots. These were deliberately staged on the eve of the concluding session of Rajya Sabha on May 6 to provide ammunition to the Congress and its allied parties to attack the NDA government. The morning of May 5, 2002, saw organised and aggressive attacks on Parikshit Nagar area of Ahmedabad city. It was marked by large-scale use of firearms and explosives. Miscreants used bombs and rocket launchers in this phase of violence. This fuelled further mistrust and animosity between the two communities.

The medical staff working in the relief camp bore the brunt of the mutual distrust between two communities. *The Times of India*, on May 6, 2002, reported:

> When a team of doctors visited the Aman Chowk relief camp in sensitive Bapunagar area of the city on Saturday they were in for a shock. Their patients in the camp accused them of being communally biased. "*Tum Hindu doctor ho na? Tumhare dimaag mein hamare liye zahar bhara hai*" (Aren't you Hindu doctors? Your minds are poisoned against us), threatened a group of inmates when the doctors refused to revise certificates of injury given to patients in the camp.
>
> The situation became so tense, recalled one of them, that we beat a hasty retreat. 'It was a horrible and unnerving experience. These people accused us of not giving certificates showing the injury as more serious than what it actually

is. We tried to explain that if a person is hit by a stone then, according to the guidelines, he'll get a certificate of only ten percent injury. But they refused to listen and started accusing us of being communally-biased,' the doctor said, pleading anonymity for safety reasons.

Attacks and threats like the one at Aman Chowk have left many of the 50 medical teams visiting relief camps worried about their security…The trend started early in April when Dr. Amit Mehta was stabbed at his clinic in Juhapura, sending a wave of panic in the medical fraternity. Subsequent attacks and threats have only confirmed the fears of the doctors. The scene is equally bad for those practicing in sensitive areas like Jamalpur, Behrampura, Bapunagar, Gomtipur, Shah Alam, Shahpur, Dariapur, and Juhapura…

Super Cop KPS Gill Deputed to Quell Violence

In the first week of May 2002, K.P.S. Gill was appointed by the Vajpayee government as a special advisor to the chief minister. His job was to review the situation, supervise and initiate steps for the efficient functioning and management of police force. By all accounts, the arrival of this famed cop set a strong signal that both the NDA government at the Centre, as well as the State government, was serious about cracking down on those fomenting communal riots. K.P.S. Gill had a salutary track record as an efficient, non-partisan cop who had earned kudos for handling explosive situations in communally-divided Assam and terrorism-infested Punjab. He may be controversial among certain NGOs and among supporters of militants because of his all-out war against Khalistani terrorists, but he is a highly respected and admired figure among the general public in Punjab. As recorded in a recently released biography[1], his arrival communicated to the rioters as well as the policemen—right from the DGP to the constable—that irresponsible actions would not be tolerated anymore.

Within days of his arrival, the city's three top police officials were replaced. K.R. Kaushik, the new police commissioner, said Gill immediately issued orders for the police to arrest anyone gathering in a mob. Even though 14 people were killed on the two days following his arrival and the violence showed no signs of abating, Gill moved swiftly to streamline the police administration. This phase witnessed blatant use

1 Rahul Chandan, K.P.S. Gill: *The Paramount Cop* (Noida: Maple Press, 2013).

of troublemakers among the Muslims to go on the offensive and provoke inter-community clashes.

The Hindu reported on May 6, 2002 that violence once again broke out in Ahmedabad and Vadodara today, shattering the fragile peace in riot-torn Gujarat. According to UNI, six persons were killed, two of them burnt alive in the renewed violence. An indefinite curfew was re-clamped in disturbed areas. A couple of incidents of stabbing were also reported from Vadodara where a police *jawan* was among the victims. In the Behrampura-Shah Alam locality a violent mob set fire to a scrap market and the fire engulfed a few adjoining houses. The rival groups came out on the streets indulging in heavy stone throwing. Allegedly, a number of bombs were also exploded.

As violence continued unabated in some areas, the State Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board announced yet another examination schedule to begin from June 3. Students who could not appear in the second phase of examinations held from April 18, and those living in relief camps (even if they had appeared in the first two phases of the examinations) were assured that they would be allowed to appear in the third phase.

In continuation of the earlier attempts at sabotage, there were reports of stabbing, mob attacks on passers-by, and on ambulances carrying patients. *The Times of India* reported on May 8, 2002: "Acceding to a Gujarat government request, the Centre has decided to send about 2,000 CRPF personnel, including nearly 200 commandos, to assist the state administration in combating communal violence." Eight companies of CRPF were also transported to Gujarat from various parts of the country. And yet sporadic incidents continued in select pockets. *The Hindu* reported on May 9, 2002 that nine persons were killed and 25 injured in overnight violence in Ahmedabad and some other parts of Gujarat today. An indefinite curfew was clamped in disturbed areas. The police unearthed a huge cache of bombs and other weapons from the town and arrested 56 persons hiding in a place of worship. They had to open fire to disperse mobs protesting against their arrest.

Maninagar also witnessed a free-for-all between the two communities with the police reporting a "barrage of private firings" besides hurling of bombs and other crude missiles at each other. Braving the firing, police carried out combing operations and recovered a large quantity of arms

and ammunition from several houses. They claimed that but for the recovery of arms and ammunition, the toll in Maninagar could have been much higher.

The Hindu again reported on May 10 that eight persons were killed—one of them burnt alive—and 35 injured as violence erupted once again in Ahmedabad. The city witnessed large-scale arson as fire brigade staff went on a flash strike late on Thursday night after three of their personnel were beaten up and a fire brigade ambulance was set afire by a violent mob. The police-housing colony in Gaekwad Haveli was also attacked by a mob, which set fire to a police motorcycle and snatched a rifle. A police constable who was dragged out of his house, however, escaped. Four persons were killed in police firing in Jamalpur and the Gaekwad Haveli, while one person was stabbed to death.

On May 12, 2002, *The Hindu* reported one of the last bouts of violence:

> At least two persons were killed and 30 injured in police firing, bomb blasts, and stone-throwing in Ahmedabad even as the city witnessed a marked decline in the intensity of violence with the new police team taking over the reins of law and order. Barring Ahmedabad, the situation elsewhere in riot-torn Gujarat was peaceful, encouraging the minorities in some rural areas to return home.
>
> Patrolling by the army and the Rapid Action Force of the trouble-prone areas has been intensified. Police have also started implementing curfew strictly and acting stringently against the law-breakers. And the known anti-social elements from both the communities have been warned of dire consequences.
>
> The new Ahmedabad Police Commissioner K.R. Kaushik, who went around the troubled areas immediately after assuming charge on Friday, visited the Shah Alam Roza camp, the largest relief camp of the minorities, and personally inquired about the problems faced by the inmates. The camp organiser, Mohsin Quadri, said that Mr. Kaushik's inquiries about the lodging of FIRs in connection with the violent incidents had a soothing effect on the inmates…
>
> On the brighter side, several instances of mutual amity were evident in the villages. Hindus in Kanij village of Anand district in central Gujarat went to the Mehmadabad relief camp and brought fellow Muslims back…A report said the Hindu sarpanch even raised funds to provide initial household kits to the affected Muslims. This encouraged the people of some other villages to follow suit….

Uday Mahurkar in *India Today*[2] sums up the nature of violence in the fourth phase and the method behind the mayhem:

> …Hindus too have begun to suffer, thanks to a new belligerence of the Muslims who have been under siege for ten weeks. The repeated recovery of huge caches of weapons from Muslim pockets forced some of the ministers to ask Modi about the steps the police was taking to flush out these armouries.
>
> What is adding to the knife-edge tension is the growing evidence that the violence has a deliberate pattern and there's a motive to keep the flames from being doused. Violence seemed to have been brought under control by the second week of March until sporadic attacks on Hindus in Ahmedabad, Bharuch, and Modasa in the midst of the state school board examinations reignited the embers. But it escalated on Ram Navmi day when a police constable was killed in Ahmedabad's Gomtipur area. The sudden spurt of violence followed a call given by local Muslim leaders to students from the community to boycott the rescheduled state school board examinations failed. Significantly, among those who were exhorting the students to boycott the exams were five local Congress leaders besides members of the radical Islamic movement, the Tableeghi Jamaat.
>
> Local BJP leaders point to other incidents to suggest there was a method in the mayhem**.** Hours after Defence Minister George Fernandes led a peace march in Ahmedabad violence broke out on the route he had taken. The area had not witnessed any riots in the recent past. **Strangely, the rioting stopped a day before Sonia Gandhi's peace rally in Ahmedabad on May 1. But, on May 5, a day before the Rajya Sabha debated the censure motion, and barely 24 hours after Gill took over his Gujarat assignment, violence erupted again.** This time Muslim rioters attacked Bhilwas locality in the Shah Alam area. Says political analyst Vidyut Thakar, "A pattern is visible in the new round of violence. There is an impression that it has to do with the Modi-hatao campaign…"[Emphasis Mine]

Contemporary news reports clearly show the government was no longer accused of either laxity or complicity. In each instance, news reports

2 Uday Mahurkar, "Out of Control," *India Today*, May 20, 2002, *Web*. http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/gujarat-riots-as-death-toll-rises-cm-narendra-modi-image-hits-a-new-low/1/219805.html.

describe quick action by the security forces even while political mischief mongers spared no efforts to sabotage efforts at restoration of peace.

Verdict of KPS Gill

Even in personal conversations with me, Gill told me that from day one, he could see that Narendra Modi was dead serious about putting down communal rioting. But his opponents had taken advantage of his inexperience in administration. In the first one-to-one meeting with Gill, Modi told him, "My first principle as a devout Hindu, and as a politician, is *Sarve Janah Sukhino Bhavanthu* (May all the people in the world be happy and peaceful). I will be thankful to you all my life if you can help me end this mayhem at the earliest…" Gill says he was moved by Modi's sincerity to end the riots. He seemed worried because his police had failed to measure up to the challenge. Modi backed him fully to take measures necessary to end this violence.[3]

To make a proper assessment of the situation, Gill started touring all those places, which had witnessed communal clashes, and listened patiently to the victims of violence as well as to the policemen on the ground. He found that a large section of policemen, as well as the administration, was infected by the communal virus and there was widespread anger against the macabre incident at Godhra. Since Modi was new to the job, the police force was not in his grip. He says, he saw evidence that "people of all political parties who were anti-Modi and anti-BJP were taking advantage of his inexperience."[4]

The first step Gill took was to interact personally with those officers who failed to prevent riots in their areas and transferred them out of sensitive posts. Officers expected to be fair in their working were given sensitive posts. This put the police force on alert that the top administration was serious about ending this blood game, and dereliction of duty would not be tolerated. He says, "Modi gave me full freedom to transfer ineffective officers and appoint appropriate replacements. I introduced a number of measures to discipline the force without any interference from Modi."

Wherever Mr. Gill went, he gave his personal mobile numbers to people and told them to call him directly in case of need. Whenever Mr. Gill had a call from somebody in need, he made sure the grievance was attended

3 Chandan, *K.P.S. Gill: The Paramount Cop*, p. 226.
4 Ibid., p. 227.

to passing the message instantly to someone who could take care of the complaint.[5] K.P.S. Gill's credibility among the Muslim community can be gauged from the fact that long after completing his task, he received numerous invitations to inaugurate reconstructed colonies meant for Muslims and attend weddings in Muslim families.

Abdullah Ibrahim Syed was the director of the Police Academy when Gujarat riots took place. However, he was handpicked by Narendra Modi to be Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to K.P.S. Gill. In a personal interview with me in the summer of 2013, he endorsed how effective Gill was in bringing sense of accountability and professionalism into the police by bringing in better officers to sensitive posts and transferring compromised cops from key positions in order to discipline and streamline the police functioning:

> K.P.S. Gill is a thorough professional. When he went for inspection to any district, the local officers broke into a sweat. I used to tell him jokingly, "Sir, we should carry napkins with us." He stayed in the CRPF camp during his assignment in Gujarat. I found it intriguing that both the Congress and some BJP leaders used to go and meet him in that camp. I also saw Haren Pandya go and meet Gill sahib. He was always Keshubhai's man. All these people clearly had one agenda-to prejudice Gill against Modi so that he gave a damaging report to the prime minister. But Modi never interfered in Gill Sahib's assignment. So Gill sahib could see for himself the difference between Modi's conduct and that of his opponents. In any case, he interacted extensively with local people and police personnel at all levels and therefore had his independent assessment.
>
> Narendra Modi is the last person to indulge in the politics of riots. He is from my home district. He is from Vadnagar and I am from neighbouring Sitpur taluka. We have several relatives in his village. They tell me that from the beginning Modi was always helpful to Muslims–be it for education or on religious issues. The riots were engineered by his enemies to defame him. Among other factors, his belonging to the OBC caste worked against him. Gujarat had a well-established tradition that only a Patel can be chief minister. Since he was sent as a replacement for Keshubhai Patel, those close to Keshubhai were determined to bring him down. Disproportionately high number of Patels in the list of the accused tells you who were the prime movers

5 Ibid., pp. 233-34.

in those riots. Patel lobbies both in the Congress and the BJP wanted to bring Modi down. Unemployed youth among scheduled castes in poor bastis were given Rs. 500 plus a bottle of liquor to go on a rampage. But I also know numerous instances where Muslims living in Hindu areas were protected by their Hindu neighbours.

Some Muslim leaders also joined hands and instigated their community. Because of lack of education, certain sections of Muslims get inflamed easily. Someone has to just start a rumour that such and such dargah or mosque has been burnt and they will go and create mayhem without even waiting to confirm if what they were told actually took place. Muslims are being encouraged to become very intolerant and communal-minded.

Modi had been in power less than four months when the Godhra incident took place. He neither knew the police officers by then, nor had he any idea of police administration. Certain officers owing loyalty to previous regimes were in key positions at that time. They worked at the behest of Modi's enemies to bring him down. Togadia's VHP used to reign supreme during Keshubhai's time and had a lot of clout with the Congress regimes as well. Now nobody dare create trouble because Modi knows by name each and every officer of Gujarat, down to the sarpanch level. He also has a very good network in Gujarat for giving him proper feedback.

End of Nightmare & Beginning of Riot-Free Gujarat

Within three months, K.P.S. Gill had succeeded in his mission to tighten the law and order machinery. Since then Modi has managed to keep the police on a tight leash on this issue. Despite continued attempts by disruptive forces both within the police and in the political establishment, Modi has succeeded in his mission to ensure a riot-free Gujarat from June 2002 onwards. The state remained calm even after the Pak-sponsored attack on Akshardham Temple on September 24, 2002, killing 33 and injuring 70 people. Likewise, Modi did not allow any retaliatory violence when Ahmedabad and Surat were targeted with serials bomb blasts by jehadis in 2008, killing 56 and injuring 200 people.

Sonia Congress has been at war with Modi because he never obliged them by playing the religion or caste card to consolidate the Hindu vote bank, unlike L.K. Advani with his Ram Mandir campaign which led to the demolition of Babri masjid. Such divisive figures serve the Congress party very well. That is why Congress lobbied frantically to have Advani declared as BJP's PM candidate instead of Modi. Modi never attacked

Islam or poured venom on Muslims, in sharp contrast to BJP's rabid elements like Haren Pandya and Gordhan Zadaphia. Modi was dangerous because by his words and actions he had made even Muslims overcome their phobia about the BJP and the RSS. In his very first election, he could inspire enough confidence in credible Muslim leaders to openly defy the Congress Party and support him with zeal. The Congress Party understood that if allowed to continue unhampered, Modi would cause a tectonic shift in Indian politics.

Since the Congress found it difficult to counter Modi politically, it ended up playing the divisive games it had perfected and made common cause with anti-Modi sections within the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, etc. who were no less upset at Modi's rise to power. That this charge is not far-fetched becomes evident if we consider that all the anti Modi-elements in BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and even the RSS, joined hands with the Congress Party one by one—some like Shankar Singh Waghela have been officially leading the Congress in Gujarat while others like Keshubhai Patel, Praveen Togadia, Babu Bajrangi, Gordhan Zadaphia, and the late Haren Pandya openly helped the Congress in launching smear campaigns against Modi. All of them brazenly joined the Congress during elections in order to topple Modi's government.

At the same time, Congress's well-orchestrated chorus calling Narendra Modi a *"maut ka saudagar"*, mass murderer, Hitler, snake, scorpion, *yamdoot,* and worse kept getting shriller by the day, duly amplified by propped up NGOs, pliable journalists, and patronised academics. So much so, that many within the BJP also came to believe the charges leveled against him and even demanded that he be sacked. Several BJP allies quit the NDA alliance, which facilitated the ousting of the otherwise popular Vajpayee-led NDA government in Delhi. The anti-Modi hysteria ensured that no one gave him a hearing; no one was willing to look at facts. How Modi retained not just his personal sanity but also emerged, as an outstanding administrator, capable of dreaming big for Gujarat and translating those dreams into action deserves serious study.

Given Modi's determination to crack down and eliminate underworld dons and international crime syndicates who had deeply embedded links in the Congress and many "secular" parties, letting him survive or grow in strength would sound the death knell of the Congress and all such parties. Congress was the first to recognise this danger and therefore went gunning for Modi from the start quickly rallying all other compromised parties to join in the battle. As we shall see in later chapters, it was not Modi, but the Congress Party that played communally-divisive politics in order to derail Modi's inclusive development agenda.

With Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the prime minister having already dislodged the Congress Party in the Central government, the Congress Party was in dire need of an issue to target the BJP at the national level and Modi in Gujarat. The Godhra carnage and the riots that followed were the product of this desperation.

CHAPTER 15

When Tragedies are Spiced Up

The Accounts of Doers Vs Noise Makers Regarding Relief Camps

In the first 2-3 days, the government response was disorganised but soon they set up an efficient system and an up-to-date chain of supplies. This government has a distinct way of functioning. If a rule is made today, within no time it will be implemented through a proper, well established system in order to curb corruption. So, the Gujarat government created a fine-tuned system, which worked well for as long as the camps lasted, which was around six months.
Inamul Iraqi, who ran one of the largest relief camps after 2002 riots

The camps had also become important showpieces for certain NGOs. It had become a daily ritual to bring in media persons, especially the foreign media, to talk to tutored victims, who began to exaggerate and overstate their case in order to garner more funds from abroad. Even in dealing with the government, some of the camp organisers had started inflating figures regarding the number of inmates.
K. Srinivas, former Collector, Ahmedabad

The relief camps had become a big scam. People started using them to garner massive funds from within India and abroad. It became another political platform for racketeers. There was no one to ask them for accounts. Therefore, keeping camps going had become a lucrative business for some.
A.I. Syed, Chairman Waqf Board, Gujarat

For years, we have heard versions of distantly placed NGOs alleging that the Gujarat government treated Muslim riot victims with total callousness and forced the closure of relief camps prematurely. It is time people heard the version of actual doers on the ground—both within the

government and the Muslim community leaders who set up and managed some of the best relief camps.

In the peak period, around 121 relief camps were organised by various social and religious organisations, most of which wound up by June 30, 2002, except 10 camps in Ahmedabad district. These 10 camps also folded up on or before December 31, 2002. And yet, even today one hears anti-Modi NGOs carry on a relentless campaign that thousands of Gujarati Muslims are still languishing in relief camps.

To check on Modi government's handling of relief operations, among others, I spoke with a highly respected community leader, Inamul Iraqi, who ran one of the largest relief camps. He rose from being an iron scrap picker to a successful entrepreneur. A part of his rags to riches story is in chapter 17. Iraqi belongs to the growing tribe of Muslims who have joined the BJP in Gujarat. Since he does not live upto the stereotype image of Muslims created by our media, we never hear sane voices like his and so they pay no heed to people like him. This is what he had to say about the government's attitude towards relief for riot victims:

> At first, the government was too stunned to comprehend what had hit them. There was total chaos all around. But, once the government recovered, they extended all help. The camp I set up through a community service organisation was called Dariakhan Ghummat camp in Ahmedabad. It was one of the best-managed relief camps. At times, we had up to 10,000 persons. On average, we had about 5,000 inmates. We ran the camp for six months. For the first few days, we had to manage on our own. But soon after, we started getting help from the government. I am a businessman associated with the steel industry and therefore, can afford to extend such help.
>
> Due to my background as a party worker, I started getting phone calls from various people reporting attacks on their mohallas or their homes. Since I have a very big house, I thought I could shelter 100-200 people in my own home. So, I proposed this to the administration. Soon after, I got a call from the Assistant Commissioner of Police Mr. Jha, saying: "There is a lot of trouble in Chamanpura. We have sent two vehicles to Jafri sahib's house to rescue people. Will you be able to handle them all?" I agreed to take care of them all. This was around 2 p.m. on February 28. As soon as I announced this, people started pouring in. By 8 p.m., 2000 people had come. Somehow, we managed food for all of them.

The BJP people wanted me to declare our camp as a party run camp but I refused to do that lest some mishap occurs in that charged atmosphere due to the presence of BJP or VHP workers. If anyone got hurt due to the poisoned atmosphere, I would have been blamed.

But, since many more people had landed than could be accommodated in my house, I got the neighbourhood school opened up for their shelter. I have a friend named Dr. Agarwal Chandramani. He is the VHP president of his area. I phoned and described the situation to him. He said, "It is my duty to come and rescue humanity. I will surely come." He came with a team of 10 doctors to my camp and treated all the injured until 3 a.m.

I asked him why he called the local VHP president despite the VHP having the image of beng rabidly anti-Muslim. Iraqi's response was:

We are friends; there is love between us. We have deep heartfelt bonds (*dili-lagaav*). These things are far more important than our respective religious identities. I can introduce you to at least 10,000 Muslims, each of whom will tell you that if they are alive today, it is because some Hindu brother helped and saved them. *Insaniyat* (humanity) did not die during the riots. After all, I did not go with a helicopter to rescue all those who took shelter in my camp. Those 10,000 people landed in my camp only because some Hindu brothers saved them. If those who went around killing were Hindus, those who saved were also Hindus. Every rescued family said, "Our Hindu neighbours saved us" or "such and such Hindus came to our rescue."

These people had come from Chamanpura, Naroda Patia, Meghani Nagar, Girdhar Nagar, Kali gaon, and other neighbouring areas. They mostly came from localities where Muslims were a small minority. Within a day, 8,000 to 10,000 people had landed in my camp.

For the first couple of days, we spent from our own pocket. I am very well off and, therefore, could take on the burden. Besides, I have a team of 10-12 persons who gave me a lot of support. We constituted a committee and managed the camp through collective responsibility. Even though our core team was Muslim but wherever we needed, Hindus friends also helped us. For instance, there were very few ration shops in our area. So, we phoned some Hindu brothers to supply truckloads of provisions. They sent whatever I asked for.

My Hindu brothers gave me full support in every respect. For instance, a weavers' mela was going on in Ahmedabad at that time. For this, several

> Muslim weavers had come from different states of India. Forty to fifty such weavers landed in my camp. The air tickets we purchased to send them back to their homes were brought to me by my Hindu friends.

Since Teesta's and other NGOs had carried out a ferocious international campaign alleging that Muslims in relief camps were harassed no end by the Modi government. I asked Inamul Iraqi what was his experience in the matter:

> I can say with full confidence that this was simply not true for our camp. In the first 2-3 days, the government response was disorganised but soon they set up an efficient system and an up-to-date chain of supplies. This government has a distinct way of functioning. If a rule is made today, within no time it will be implemented through a proper, well established system in order to curb corruption. So, the Gujarat government created a fine-tuned system, which worked well for as long as the camps lasted, which was around six months.
>
> The medical facilities provided by the State government were also very good. At that time, S.K. Nanda Sahib was the secretary and Amarjit Singh was the commissioner of Ahmedabad. He created a team for our camp under Chaddha sahib. That team used to check up the camp on a daily basis. If we needed any medicines or a patient needed an operation, the Gujarat government arranged all of it for free.

This is what Iraqi had to say when I asked him whether, during that period, Teesta Setalvad, Shabnam Hashmi or other NGO leaders who critiqued the government, came to offer him any help:

> Teesta, Hashmi, and others did come to our camps but they did not give us even one rupee by way of help. They would come, record the sad stories of victims, take photographs, and leave. None of them said to me, "We have this much money to offer you, tell us how you want it spent." I'm not interested in working with those kind of NGOs. I have the capacity to do social service on my own strength and have my own social organisation called Gujarat Sarvajanik Relief Committee. But we don't put a single person's salary to the NGO's account, not even travel or other expenses. I cover all that from my own pocket. I feel that if God has given me so much and made me so capable, I should be able to take care of my community when it is in trouble. In 1996-

97, I had sought their votes for the BJP. Therefore, it was my duty to be with them in their hour of grief.

Just as Muslims gathered at my house, so also did Hindu riot victims end up in relief camps set up by the Hindu community. But, Hindu camps were far fewer in number. Our organisation is meant to service our own community. We don't do anything for publicity nor do we go chasing courts. We do our work quietly. I'm the only one in our NGO who doesn't sport a beard or wear a skullcap. All others do. They are all God-fearing. Whatever we do, we do for our Allah.

There were nearly 25 relatively smaller camps in Ahmedabad with 100, 200 or 500 people. Ours was the biggest. Salim Khan and Mehboob Khan ran the other big camp. They too spent money from their pocket for the first 2-3 days. Thereafter, Gujarat government made very good arrangements for ration and other supplies. There was never any dearth of relief material after the government stepped in.

The Government's Version

K. Srinivas, an IAS officer, reputed to be efficient as well as sensitive to minority rights issues, was the Collector of Ahmedabad at the time. Therefore, he was among those handling relief operations in the city. This is his version of how they handled relief work:

Let me start with my own experience in responding to riot victims. The first relief camp in Ahmedabad came to be set up in Aman Chowk area of the old city. When the local Corporator Taufeeq Khan phoned to inform me about that impromptu camp, I told him right away that the camp has government approval and will receive all support. However, not many other politicians set up relief camps. Religious organisations – both Hindus and Muslims – led the relief work. All of them received prompt sanction and support.

My first visit to a relief camp was on March 2 that is on the third day of riots. Some areas were so badly hit that even the army could not enter those neighbourhoods. Only the revenue and Ahmedabad municipal corporation staff could reach them.

On visiting those camps, I realised that a lot of families had been split apart in the chaos. We took photographs of all those who claimed they had lost a family member and pasted them in all the camps. Once the missing people were identified, the families were re-united under state security. This is how scattered family members came to be united fast. During my visit to one of

the camps that day, one old man came up to me very angrily and said: "As a citizen, I expect the government to provide me relief, not some religious organisation or NGO." I immediately met the chief minister and told him that we need to respond to this sentiment. I said, *roti honi chahiye sarkar ki, par jo parose voh aisa ho jis par logon ko bharosa ho*. (The food in relief camps should be provided by the government but the people who serve the food must be those that inspire confidence). We must ensure that the caregiver is able to offer compassionate support." The CM agreed at once and said, "We will not only provide relief in kind but also some pocket money to each family for non-food expenses."

Barring the first 2-3 days when religious and community organisations managed on their own, the entire infrastructure, wherewithal, food, and other relief materials were provided by the government. Even in the first two days, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation provided health and sanitation support. Later on, when systems were put in place, much of the initial expenditure of NGOs was reimbursed. Mr. Modi is not given to doing things in a knee-jerk and chaotic manner. So, we set up a well-organised system of relief. But the caregiver was a local organisation.

In order to provide immediate help to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in riot-affected areas, free food grains, i.e., wheat and rice were distributed as these families were deprived of daily employment on account of communal disturbances. This totalled to 1,77,519 tons of food grain.

From March until mid-May, camps were run efficiently. However, with the onset of the monsoon, new issues cropped up. Camps that were not housed in *pucca* structures had to be relocated to *pucca* structures. Where government buildings were not available, we decided to hire community-owned or private buildings. I reached out to nearly 46 Muslim community organisations—many had community buildings. But, not many of them were willing to give their buildings even on hire although we were willing to pay market rents. We only managed to rent out four big spaces from Muslim Jammat. The most cooperative among them at that time was the Kureish Jamaat.

We set up adequate toilets, kitchens, sanitation health care, trauma care, shelters, and even provided clothing. Gynaecological care, crèches, psychological counselling, were also provided. In addition, we organised mental health camps by a team of psychiatrists. Mr. Modi is a stickler for systematic work. Therefore, once the administration recovered from the shock of Godhra and post-Godhra carnage, our relief work was very systematic. Apart from providing ration, we also gave an identity card to each inmate and

maintained meticulous records. Everyone was registered on the spot. Those who wanted to start going to work, were given free bus passes. Medical officers were appointed for each camp.

An Executive Magistrate was made in-charge of each camp. The chief minister personally reviewed the relief work on a daily basis. In fact, if you compare the record of Gujarat government in relief work with that of earlier or even later riots, you will find we did far better than all others. Oxfam, in fact, wrote a letter of appreciation to us. Those who say the CM did not visit relief camps for the first 3-4 days need to understand that it was not easy to enter those areas in that inflamed atmosphere. When Sonia ji came to Ahmedabad on March 4, 2002, we told even her that it is very unsafe for her to go to those sensitive areas. We took her to Dariakham Gummat but not the Shah Alam Roza or the Aman Chowk Camp. But, the CM started visiting relief camps from March 3 onwards.

Muslim Officer Given Over all Charge: The chief minister put a Muslim IAS officer S.M.F. Bukhari, as the overall in-charge of relief work. He had just retired when the riots broke out. But, CM Modi extended his tenure and made him in-charge of relief and rehabilitation work. The collector and the municipal commissioner closely monitored each of the relief camps. Other senior officials like the commissioner (health), the secretary (Social Justice & Empowerment Department), etc. were visiting the camps frequently. In other districts, the collector and other district officials monitored camps. The decision to put secretary-level officials with special responsibilities for overseeing and supervision of specific relief camps and other rehabilitation measures in the districts was meant to make the arrangements more effective.

All Party Committee to Monitor Camps: However, as the attacks against the Gujarat government mounted in the media and in Parliament, an All-Party Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the governor of Gujarat to monitor the functioning of the relief and review the action taken by different departments of the government for rehabilitation of riot-affected families. This 13-member committee consisted of the chief minister, several NGOs including those hostile to Modi, the leader of opposition and other Congress Party leaders as well as representatives of the Chambers of Commerce. The quantum of relief was decided by the Committee.

Relief Overseen by Governor: According to Gujarat government officials, this was the first time ever that after a riot any State government

made the Governor, a Central government appointee, to oversee relief and rehabilitation operations in order to maintain transparency. However, the attacks continued unabated and numerous propaganda tracts containing all kinds of horror stories regarding relief camps were broadcast all over the world.

Charge of Victims Being Maltreated in Camps

Various NGOs raised hell both in courts and through media alleging that riot victims were maltreated and harrased by the government even while in camps. However, both the Gujarat High Court and Supreme Court of India rejected all such petitions. The Gujarat High Court in fact put down its appreciation of the steps taken by the government in the management of the camps. Here is a key extract from that order:

> It must be said that since the State has already appointed Mr. S.M.F. Bukhari, a retired I.A.S. Officer, as Chief Coordinator for looking after the relief and rehabilitation facility at various camps…, the Court is of the opinion that the State has also taken care to some extent in trying to sort out the problem, which is ventilated by the petitioners in this petition, and the said gesture on the part of the State is required to be appreciated. The efforts put in by the State Government in this behalf, as indicated above, are required to be appreciated [Gujarat High Court Order - Special CA No: 3773 of 2002, (3 May 2002)]

The High Court continued to monitor the relief operations, but the NGOs did not rest at peace and filed a petition in the Supreme Court alleging ill-treatment of victims in camps. However, the Apex Court advised them to take their complaints to the High Court, which was in any case overseeing the operations. The amicus curie's suggestion in the Supreme Court to constitute a cell to reopen relief and rehabilitation matters was not accepted by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court disposed of these petitions and directed the petitioners (Mahashweta Devi and Mallika Sarabhai) to approach the Gujarat High Court, where these issues are being monitored. [Supreme Court of India - WP (Crl.) No.530/2002 & WP (crl.) No. 221 of 2002, (17 Aug 2004)]. But the raving and ranting of NGOs continued long after the last Muslim had returned safely to his or her home.

Zafar Sareshwala, whose family was closely involved in running one of the relief camps, says:

Despite the High Court and Supreme Court endorsing the measures taken by the Gujarat government regarding relief and rehabilitation measures, some of these NGOs go on and on attacking Modi for keeping Muslims in camps under sub-human conditions. People did not know the real picture about those relief camps. They have only been fed partisan propaganda. Our team went recently to the refugee camps in Assam. My brother said, "I have not seen Muslims anywhere in India in such a pitiable condition as in Assam's refugee camps; the conditions there were squalid beyond imagination. Even today 2.5 lakh Muslims are still in refugee camps, that too under the Congress regime." [This was said in January 2013]

My brother had run refugee camps in Gujarat so he was able to compare. Gujarat relief camps were far better run and the government was very cooperative. This is not to say that refugee camps can ever be a pleasant or comfortable place to live in. But, the government made arrangements for food, medical care, and all the rest better than most governments in India do. Assam's Muslims are in the most pathetic condition but there is no mention of them anywhere. Neither Teesta nor Shabnam Hashmi has much time for them. Hundreds of thousands are still in those camps but do you hear any discussion in the media about those camps? They are already forgotten, but these same people keep ranting about the plight of Muslims in Gujarat relief camps even though those folded by mid-2002, within four months of the riots.

As far as government's support for rehabilitation is concerned, the compensation packages in any riot are nothing compared to the losses suffered by the people. Nowhere in India do riot victims ever get close to what they lose. You barely get a couple of lakhs in compensation from the government. But, the Gujarat government gave prompt compensation to families who suffered losses, including to those whose business establishments were destroyed. This may not mean much to wealthy Muslims but Rs. 1 or 2 lakh means a lot to the poor. The system put in place by Gujarat government was neither chaotic nor fitful.

India Today also reported in its May 20, 2002, issue that, "Mohsin Kadri, a leading lawyer and key organiser of the Shah Alam Relief Camp, the largest relief camp in the state which shelters over 10,000 riot victims, says that the attitude of the state Government officials is satisfactory. 'We don't have any complaints at the moment. The chief minister has promised that relief camps won't be closed till the rehabilitation problem is solved.'"

Zafar Sareshwala says that while the relief camps were run satisfactorily, when it came to rebuilding damaged or destroyed homes, "Muslims did not wait for anything to come from the government. Organisations like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, Jamat-e-Islamia, Imarat-e-Sharia, some Muslim NGOs from Hyderabad, Bihar and several other non-Muslim NGOs worked together to build homes for riot victims. We got very little help from NRIs. If a man has Rs. 1 crore and gives you only Rs. 10 in charity, it has very little worth. Compared to the financial standing of the people in England or America, we got very little help from them. But, community organisations and Indian NGOs—both Hindu and Muslim—constructed or rebuilt a total of 15,000 houses. I think this should be a lesson for everyone in the country."

Inamul Iraqi's organisation was one of those that undertook some part of this job. He says:

> We got nearly 1,000 houses constructed for riot victims. Every house had one room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. It cost us Rs. 1.5 lakh for the city-based houses and Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 30,000 rupees for village homes. The Gujarat government was somewhat weak when it came to reconstruction of homes of riot victims. We identified Muslims who were a tiny minority in Hindu neighbourhoods and created a consolidated housing pocket for them in large Muslim pockets so that they are not easy targets in future. In all, about 10,000-15,000 Muslim homes had to be reconstructed in different parts of Gujarat.

The Gujarat government may not have constructed homes for riot victims but each family was given the monetary help to rebuild their damaged or destroyed houses.

Did Government Force People out of Camps ?

I asked Modi what he had to say about the allegation that his government rushed the closure of camps. Modi replied:

> Firstly, it was not just Muslims who were in relief camps. There were many relief camps for Hindus as well. They folded up much earlier. Many of the relief camps were running in schools, which had to reopen in the month of June. Was it wrong to get the schools to reopen in time?
>
> For instance, when Surat was overtaken by floods, we had no choice but to shift all the *jhopadpatti* dwellers to school and other public buildings. But,

> once the floods receded, we asked them to return home so that school children did not suffer loss of teaching even for one day. Similarly, in 2002 also, it was important to have the school buildings vacated in time for the next session. Secondly, we needed to restore normalcy, which you can't do if relief camps continue indefinitely.

Inamul Iraqi also confirmed that there was no pressure on any of the organisers of camps to shut down prematurely. At a meeting of Jamiat-e-Islami in the summer of 2013, where I was invited as a speaker, one of the leading members of the host organisation said from the dais that Muslim riot victims are still rotting in relief camps in Gujarat. As late as February 26, 2012, Aamir Raza Hussain went ballistic on national TV to charge that thousands of riot victims were still languishing in camps due to Modi's tyranny. I asked Iraqi if that was true. He was emphatic that not a single person remained in any camp after October 2002 in the state. Modi described some of the other difficulties in prolonging relief camps indefinitely:

> There were many cases whereby families that had come from a certain village left one or two members to stay in the camp, whereas the other four returned. Tell me, what is the logic or implication of this? It was being alleged that Muslims are fleeing villages out of fear and coming to Ahmedabad. In reality, it became a strategy for some to find a foothold in Ahmedabad for migration. Half the family continued staying in the village while the other half used the relief camp in order to make the transition to settling down in Ahmedabad. But, they used the riots as a fig leaf. How could half the family continue living in the village unless there was peace there? They had to be urged to return to their homes. If they had a problem, we were committed to protecting them. We have honoured that promise. There has not been a single riot in Gujarat since then.

The *Paanch-Panchees* Speech

When I asked Modi about his infamous statement on camps having become baby production factories, this is what he had to say:

> The one-liner about "*hum paanch, hamare pachees*" that is often quoted to project me as anti-Muslim or to prove that I ridiculed relief camps as child producing factories was never used in the context of riot relief camps. There

were many Hindu camps as well and I was actually arranging for even gynaecologists to visit both types of camps because one is duty-bound to serve pregnant women.

This phrase was not uttered just to target relief camps. I say it even now that the population of our country is increasing rapidly. Today, if a farmer has five sons, they will soon, between them, produce 25. Today, you have 5 acres of land. Imagine how it is going to be fragmented when divided between five sons! How will you manage your families or educate your children with such meagre resources? I explain all this to people, even today.

This speech of mine was delivered in November or December 2002. Most camps had folded up much before that. Those who criticise me for that statement, never mention that within months of Godhra, there was an Islamic terrorist group attack on Akshardham and yet my Gujarat remained peaceful. This was followed by serial bomb blasts. No one talks about the fact that we maintained absolute peace even after that provocation. Some people have decided to pillory one man for their vested interests. That is their only agenda.

This charge was also examined by the Supreme Court appointed SIT. It did not find it worthy of serious note or action, since the speech on the paramount need for family planning was delivered without naming any community and it was not followed by any communal tension or riot.[1]

However, Zafar Sareshwala has a slightly different take on it. He had told me in March 2013 that he had questioned Modi on this tasteless remark some years ago. Modi is supposed to have said that such indiscretions slip out during the heat of election campaign. Zafar says since all other actions of Modi communicated real concern for Muslims, this loose remark need not be taken too seriously. But Zafar provided an insight into what was actually at play:

These things are hushed up but this comment was made in the backdrop of certain untoward happenings in refugee camps. There were a number of incidents of rape, sexual molestation and extramarital liaisons resulting in pregnancies within the camps. All this happened within the community. That is why many of us wanted these camps to wind up fast and get uprooted families

1 Special Investigation Team (SIT), *Report in Compliance to the Order Dated 12.09.2011 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the Complaint dated 08.06.2006 of Smt. Jakia Nasim Ahesan Jafri*, pp. 201-02.

return to their homes. When families are huddled together in a crowded space, these things can't be controlled. That is why farsighted community leaders wanted that these camps should not continue indefinitely because there were plenty of instances of misbehaviour with women. Moreover, we didn't want our community to get sucked into a culture of dependency. We were keen to see them back home and rebuild their lives rather than live on charity in camps. It destroys the self-respect of any community.

Vested Interests in Continuing Camps Indefinitely

In its issue of May 20, 2002, *India Today* reported another facet of the problem:

> Among the factors, which kept the communal pot boiling in Ahmedabad are the 40-odd relief camps in the city in which over 50,000 Muslims are lodged. Another 50,000 live in camps spread across the state. There is pressure on the Government to close these relief camps amid unconfirmed reports that at least some of the camps have become sanctuaries for Muslim troublemakers.

India Today correspondent Uday Mahurkar described this mischief element in a personal interview with me:

> I was a personal witness to the following incident. On 3rd or 4th of March, I entered Shah Alam dargah, which had been converted into a refugee camp. Baldeep Singh photographer was with me. On one side of the dargah there is a big room where one lady named Belim was briefing the press and giving highly exaggerated accounts of what had happened. She was crying hysterically in front of journalists. As soon as the media persons moved away, she instantly stopped howling. This made it obvious that it was all a play-act. On the other side of the partition, there was a squint-eyed man from Karnataka. A lady was sitting with him with a tape recorder tutoring this Muslim from Karnataka to say, "I am so angry at the riots that I am going to become a terrorist." Teesta has a real perverse streak in her. She had started tutoring witnesses from the start as though she was just waiting for this riot to break out.

K. Srinivas, who was among those who maintained meticulous accounts of relief work, explained why certain elements were resisting winding up of camps:

> The charge that the CM forced the relief camps to close while the victims were not ready to go back is baseless. We had to begin consolidation of camps because by mid-May, two factors emerged: some portions of the city had turned peaceful and many people slowly started returning to their homes. The second was the onset of monsoon in the first week of June. With rains about to start, the safety, comfort, and health of the residents was my major worry. By then, a large number of camp residents had on their own started going to their homes. So I obtained the chief minister's approval to issue two months' ration in advance to each household, intending to return back to their homes, to help them settle down. When we started consolidation of camps, there was a lot of resistance from some of the camp organisers, who had begun to treat camps as a moneymaking venture. They were interested in continuing with the camps because they had started siphoning off a portion of government funds and relief. The existence of camps gave them legitimacy to raise funds within the country and abroad. Therefore, they wanted to drag on the camps for as long as they could.
>
> The camps had also become important showpieces for certain NGOs. It had become a daily ritual to bring in media persons, especially the foreign media, to talk to tutored victims, who began to exaggerate and overstate their case in order to garner more funds from abroad. Even in dealing with the government, some of the camp organisers had started inflating figures regarding the number of inmates. Therefore, I began going for night inspections to check how many people actually still lived in the camps. I was attacked for trying to discipline them.

Abdullah Ibrahim Syed, the current chairman of the Gujarat Waqf Board and the former additional director general of police endorsed this aspect in a personal interview: "The relief camps had become a big scam. People started using them to garner massive funds from within India and abroad. It became another political platform for racketeers. There was no one to ask them for accounts. Therefore, keeping camps going had become a lucrative business for some." To continue with K. Srinivas's account:

> On July 1, I got a call from the State Secretariat saying I would have to travel to Delhi along with a couple of other officers, including the relief commissioner, because an eminent persons' group was calling on the prime minister on July 2, 2002, to raise their concerns about relief camps. Prime Minister Vajpayee was chairing that meeting, attended by a galaxy of eminent people such as Shri I.K.

Gujral, former Chief Justice Shri Ahmadi, Swami Agnivesh, Shri Muchkund Dubey, etc. On the basis of media reports and some perfunctory visit reports of a member, they had many critical things to say against our work.

As a relatively junior officer at that time, I had to explain the actual ground reality within 20 minutes. By this time, Rs. 4 crore worth of rations had already been distributed to all those returning home from relief camps. To normalise lives of those who were still residing in camps, we had undertaken several measures. One of these came under scrutiny. I was asked, "How do people go to work from the camps?" I told them that we were giving them free bus passes for three months' duration to enable free movement from the camps to the places of work. At this, Syeda Hamid raised a strange objection saying, "*Kya hai yeh? Kya bus mein jayenge yeh log?*"(What is this? Do you expect the inmates to commute by bus to work?). At this point, the Hon'ble Prime Minister intervened and asked, "If not a bus, what other mode of transport do you expect for them?"

Thereafter, I told the prime minister that when I got a telephone call the previous night informing me of this meeting in Delhi, I right away sent my people to take photographs of the camps. I had carried those latest photographs of people in the camps as at 2.30 a.m., that is just a few hours before the meeting with the prime minister. I asked to be permitted to share the photographs with all present. After seeing the photographs and hearing my explanations, the PM said to the others, this officer is speaking the truth and providing a correct picture. As a civil servant, it was a highly satisfactory moment for me.

The empathy with which the relief work was handled, the partnerships that were established, deserved appreciation. Instead, all that the government got was criticism. We functioned with a very high level of transparency. On April 2, 2002 we even took the Hon'bl President of India Abdul Kalam on his first state visit to the worst affected spots in the state, such as the Naroda Patia. He met people along with the chief minister. It was a well-covered event. He held detailed discussion and did a thorough review for one-and-a-half days.

Our chief minister has a different style; he doesn't make scapegoats of officials and transfer them to some other job as a show of disciplinary action. He owns up the problem and takes full responsibility on his own head. It is his way of not shirking responsibility. He never shifts the blame on others. That is why for some he becomes synonymous with the problem, because they don't credit him with the solutions!

Relief and Rehabilitation Measures at a Glance

The seriousness of relief work is evident from the fact that from the beginning, all the relief measures were meticulously recorded and computerised to ensure transparency and accountability in the distribution of relief material.

- **Cash Compensation:** Rs. 1.5 lakh to the next of kin of those killed in riots. Out of this sum, Rs. 1 lakh was borne by the PM's relief fund.
- **Supply of Food Grain:** The State government provided free food grain assistance as well as shade and shelters to all the inmates of relief camps run by the local NGOs, voluntary agencies and community leaders. The assistance per capita per day included wheat flour (400 gm); rice (100 gm); edible oil (50 gm); pulses (50 gm); and milk powder (50 gm). Besides ration, the relief camp organisers were given cash assistance to meet with the contingency expenditure for inmates at Rs.7 per day per head in addition to cash assistance of Rs. 15 per day per person, for five persons per family.
- **Water Supply:** Adequate and chlorinated water supply was provided to the inmates. Twenty-four tankers, 81 Sintex tanks in Ahmedabad city, and 12 tankers in other districts were placed for providing water supply.
- **Sanitation:** Apart from existing toilet facilities, new toilets were erected and mobile vans with 10 toilets were arranged round the clock.
- **Medical and Psychological Treatment in the Camps:** As per government records, 205 medical officers and 273 paramedical staff provided health care services in the relief camps. Around 450,596 cases were treated. In other words, each camp patient was examined, on an average, 3-4 times. As a result, the prevalence of various illnesses, which could have been very high, was kept in check. Medical attention included trauma, mental health, nutrition, natal and antenatal care, preventive, tertiary care and eye check-up. None of the camps reported the spread of any epidemic.
- Teams of 30 gynaecologists, paediatricians, and mental health experts were sent by rotation to different camps. Eye check-ups were done, wherein 11,624 patients were examined, 5,050 pairs of spectacles were distributed, and 213 IOL (Intraocular lens) operations were performed in the camps. Other mental health initiatives included group counselling sessions, individual psychotherapeutic intervention, and trauma counselling especially for women and children.

- **Special Antenatal Care for Mothers:** 4,333 expectant mothers were registered under the antenatal care programme; 127 of these were identified as being at high risk and were examined by expert gynaecologists. A total of 126 safe deliveries were registered, out of which 36 were handled in camps. A holistic programme, keeping in mind the health of pregnant and lactating mothers, was implemented that included tetanus protection, distribution of delivery kits for *dais* and provision of iron folic acid tablets for anaemic mothers.
- **Health Care for Children:** By way of preventive health measures for children, 16,847 were given polio immunisation; 12,407 got vaccinated for measles, 3,851 were given DTP vaccine. 2.76 lakhs of iron folic acid tablets and 66,640 ORS (Oral Rehydration Salts) packets were distributed for children. In addition, de-worming, growth monitoring, pre-school education, and supplementary nutrition were also provided in the camps. As a result, no child died in the relief camps. This comes as a sharp contrast to the shameful news of 50 children dying of cold at relief camps in the riot-hit Muzaffarnagar under ultra 'secular' Samajwadi Party government in Uttar Pradesh in 2013.
- **Rehabilitation of Orphaned Children and Widows**: The State government undertook a survey of orphans, widows, disabled persons and destitute persons living in the camps. 435 riot-affected widows were covered under the State government's pension scheme. Some women were also accommodated under Swavlamban Scheme for women's livelihood restoration; 5,858 women were given financial assistance. Three Swadhar homes were established, which provided shelter to 196 homeless women and 148 children.
- **Special Education Facilities to Students in Relief Camps:** In relief camps, textbooks were distributed to all the students of S.S.C./H.S.C. In addition, kits comprising pen, pencils, notebooks, textbooks, reference books and free of cost tuitions were arranged.
- **Housing Assistance**: Rs. 50,000 was paid by the government to 18,037 urban riot-affected families towards repairing their houses. This totalled to Rs.12.28 crores in urban areas. Similarly, in rural areas, 11,204 families were provided with a housing assistance worth Rs. 17.82 crores. These amounts compare favourably with the amounts spent by Inamul Iraqi's organisation.

- **Household Kits**: Each riot-affected family was given a household kit worth Rs. 2,500 as it left the camp.
- **Financial Assistance for Rebuilding Earning Assets:** Rs 9.13 crores were disbursed to 17,195 families whose means of livelihood had been destroyed.
- **Rehabilitation of Small Businesses:**
  a) In order to cover those people in whose case restoration of earning assets required more than Rs.10,000 and up to Rs.50,000, the government gave a package of rebuilding small businesses implemented through the Social Justice & Empowerment Department.
  b) Under this package, 2,141 affected persons were given assistance for small business in urban areas worth Rs.1.34. In rural areas, 707 families got assistance worth 46 lakhs.
  c) The nationalised banks and financial institutions provided loan (with interest subsidy for three years), worth Rs.9.26 crore to 2,844 persons for small industrial projects.
  d) The Gujarat Minorities Finance and Development Corporation, under the scheme of direct finance at lower rate of interest, provided finance of Rs. 3.96 crores to 1,510 riot-affected persons.
- **Assistance to Industries, Shops & Hotels:** The State government formulated a package to revise industrial units, large shops, big showrooms and hotels, etc., involving restoration cost of more than Rs.50,000. Under this package, 20 per cent of the subsidy was provided subject to a ceiling of Rs.50,000 per unit. 2,083 units were given assistance of Rs.5.09 crore in urban areas while 545 units were provided assistance of Rs.1.16 crore in rural areas.

The purpose of providing this list is not to suggest that such packages can ever fully compensate for the trauma and losses suffered by people during riots. This is only to point out that the picture painted by professional Modi baiters is misleading. As with all other aspects of administration, Gujarat government's relief effort was executed in collaboration with the Muslim community organisations in a thoughtful, transparent, and systematic manner after the first three-four chaotic days. That is why one can get detailed accounts of the last rupee spent on relief. Also Gujarat's relief camps also they did produce the kind of tragedies that relief camps in Muzaffarnagar and Assam have witnessed.

End of Politics of Terror

However, the real test of Modi's regime lies in how Muslims, including riot victims, have fared after 2002. The very fact that the Muslims of Gujarat are deserting Congress and drifting towards BJP is proof that they feel a greater sense of security in Modi's regime. This is what Maharashtra's former Inspector General of Police S.M. Mushrif, said in an interview to the *Milli Gazette* on May 27, 2013:

> …And strangely enough (my Muslim brethren will forgive me for saying so), the most safe place for Muslims today is Gujarat, only because its Chief Minister Mr. Narendra Modi has "banned" entry to the Intelligence Bureau (IB) in Gujarat….After 'banning' IB, the Muslim atrocities in Gujarat have stopped. That is what is required to be done if we want to put a full stop to fake encounters, false terror attacks, their fabricated investigations and arrests of innocent Muslim boys...

I haven't yet looked into the IB angle but I know for sure that bringing a sense of security to Muslims also meant bringing the police under better discipline. However, the fact that Mushrif has to apologise for giving his community good news from Gujarat, gives us an idea of the kind of intellectual terror Congress and its "secular" allies have come to exercise among Muslims. They must appear as permanent victims in the Congress scheme of things or else be declared traitors as happened with Salman Khan, who dared speak a few mild words in favour of Modi's regime or, worse still, be bulldozed into silence as happened with Maulana Vastanvi.

CHAPTER 16

Of Skullcaps and Puppies

Media Distorts News, Adds Fuel to the Fire

For any humanist, such an incident [Godhra train burning] would cause indescribable grief. But, at the same time, creating disturbances (ashanti), indiscipline and expressing outrage (akrosh) is not the solution…Won't you help the government in saving Gujarat? Won't you help us in maintaining peace and harmony? The Government of Gujarat appeals to you for help...for shanti (peace) and sanyam (restraint/self-discipline)…I also want to express my gratitude to you that, in the midst of so much anger, out of the 18,000 villages of Gujarat, disturbances have broken out only in a handful of them… It is my request to you, tit for tat is not a solution. Ver ver thi shamtu nathi (hatred is never won over by hatred)…The government seeks your help in punishing the guilty through the due process of law. The government seeks your help in creating an environment of peace so that law can take its own course…

In order to instill life into the mantra of Jai Garvi Gujarat, we need to follow the path of peace…Safety and social harmony is my assurance. My government is as much theirs [that of Muslims] as of anyone else… There is no place for retributive justice in a civilised society

Narendra Modi in his peace appeal on February 28, 2002

One day when honest accounts of Gujarat riots begin to be written, the conduct of our national media, especially some of its reigning stars, in spreading a misinformation campaign against Gujarat, in adding fuel to the fire in pursuit of partisan politics, will be remembered as one of the darkest chapters in the history of post-independence India.

The 2002 Gujarat riots happened to be the first one to be covered 24x7 by television channels. Some of our high-profile news anchors, who were budding reporters at that time, crossed all lines of journalistic integrity while reporting on Godhra riots and the post-Godhra violence. They went

berserk even while the fires were raging—not just because they got the opportunity of appearing heroic and emoting before the nation as valiant defenders of the Muslim community, but primarily because the Congress had set up a whole team of loyalists to manipulate and distort news in tandem with Congress-allied NGOs. Since premier news channels like NDTV owed huge financial obligations to the Congress regime[1], they became willing megaphones for the Congress Party. With such a high-profile media house becoming the Congress Party's in house channel[2], bringing others in line was relatively easy. In the process, they helped escalate violence and increased the estrangement between Hindus and Muslims. Thus far we have heard only the version of Modi baiters in the media. It is time we heard Modi's version on how some of our TV stars actually worked to add fuel to the fire.

> It was my endeavour that we restore peace at the earliest possible. If you look at the data, you will see that in 72 hours we had managed to curb the riots and bring the situation under control. But these TV channels kept on broadcasting the same incidents over and over again. At the time, Rajdeep Sardesai and Barkha Dutt both worked for NDTV. To give a few illustrative examples of how Barkha acted in the most irresponsible manner during those inflamed days: Surat had not witnessed any communal killings, barring a few small clashes. However, the bazaars were closed. Barkha stood amidst closed shops screaming, "This is Surat's diamond market, but there is not a single policeman here!"
>
> I phoned Barkha and asked, are you providing the address of this 'unprotected' bazaar to the rioting mobs? Are you inviting them to come and create trouble there saying there is no police here so you can run amok safely?
>
> In a second incident at Anjar, she played up the news that a Hanuman Mandir had been vandalised and the structure destroyed. I told her, what are you up to? You are in Kutch, which is a border district. There you are showing the attack and destruction of a mandir. Do you realise the implications of

1 For one of the early scams involving NDTV read: Express News Service, "CBI Case Against Prannoy Roy," *The Financial Express*, January 20, 1998, *Web.* http://www.financialexpress.com/old/ie/daily/19980120/02051164.html.

2 For NDTV's latest financial scam see: Madhu Purnima Kishwar, "NDTV & Chidambaram Accused of Money Laundering Scam of Rs. 5500 cr.," *Manushi*, January 16, 2014, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1751#.Uv8NdUKSxJM.

broadcasting such news? We haven't yet recovered from the earthquake. Have you actually done proper investigation into the riots? Why are you lighting fires for us? It takes a few minutes for you to broadcast all over the country that such-and-such place is unprotected or a mandir has been vandalised but it takes me hours to move the police from one disturbed location to another since these incidents are breaking out in the most unexpected places.

What's worse, when I got the matter enquired by the local police, we found out that it was a small, insignificant structure under a tree which had been damaged a little bit by hoodlums But NDTV presented it as an attack on a Hanuman Mandir and even showed on camera a decapitated idol of Hanuman ji. When the fires were raging, these journalists were pouring fuel on those flames.

Since Rajdeep Sardesai was among the leading reporters covering the disturbances, I phoned him to say that I will have to put a temporary ban on your channel if you continue with your provocative coverage. For that one day, I had put a ban on TV channels because they were actually fomenting trouble. I told him that there is a well-established regulation that the media should not name communities during communal riots, nor identify a damaged place as a mandir or a masjid. Why are you violating that code and well-set protocols about not naming communities or identifying places of worship? You are going against established norms.

It has already been well-documented how false reports were spread about a pregnant Muslim woman whose stomach was allegedly ripped open, her foetus wrenched out with a sword, and set on fire. BBC lent credibility to this rumour in its report of March 6, 2002. Harsh Mander repeated the same story in a tear-jerking article published on March 20, 2002, in *The Times of India*. The *Tehelka* website lent further colour and credence to it by writing that a woman named Saira Banu had claimed that the victim of that gruesome incident was her sister-in-law.

But nothing beats the mischief and arrogance of Arundhati Roy's blood and gore reporting of the same story on the basis of hearsay. She wrote in the *Outlook* magazine of May 6, 2002:

Last night, a friend from Baroda called. Weeping. It took her fifteen minutes to tell me what the matter was. It wasn't very complicated. Only that Sayeeda, a friend of hers, had been caught by a mob. Only that her stomach had been

> ripped open and stuffed with burning rags. Only that after she died, someone carved 'OM' on her forehead.[3]

Disturbed by this account, Balbir Punj, BJP Rajya Sabha MP personally contacted the Gujarat police and asked them to verify the story. Clearly, no such case had been reported to the Gujarat police. Therefore, they asked Roy to provide leads that could help them reach the victim's family and book those who were guilty of the crime. She responded through her lawyer, Prashant Bhushan, to say that the police had no right to issue summons to her.

In the same lengthy article in *Outlook,* Roy had reported that the daughters of Ehsan Jafri, the ex-MP from the Congress Party who was done to death in Gulberg Society, were also raped and killed along with him. In this case, Roy got caught spinning gory tales by none other than Jafri's son who issued a clarification that his sisters were not in the city at the time of the riots. In fact, one of them was living in the United States. Unfazed, Roy replied that she had got the information from two other sources, one a report in *Time* magazine and another, a supposedly independent fact-finding mission. Incidentally, this "fact finding" team had actually been organised by Teesta Setalvad and Shabnam Hashmi with one of the most corrupt and compromised retired IG of Police as a lead member of the pack. The much-venerated Retired Supreme Court Judge Justice Krishna Iyer was used as a figurehead but the report was put together by professional BJP baiters. Roy was brazen enough to write:

> This and other genuine errors in recounting the details of the violence in Gujarat in no way alter the substance of what journalistic finding missions, or writers like myself, are saying.[4]

Since the then *Outlook* Editor Vinod Mehta is a die-hard fan of Roy's writings, she got away with her bloody fantasies without having to offer a half-decent apology. But Balbir Punj wrote in his counter article in *Outlook* dated May 27, 2002:

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3 Arundhati Roy, "Democracy: Who's She When She's at Home," *Outlook India*, May 6, 2002, *Web.* http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?215477.

4 Arundhati Roy, "To the Jaffri Family, An Apology" *Outlook India*, May 27, 2002, *Web.* http://www.outlookindia.com/feedbacks.aspx?typ=100&val=215477&source=published&commentid=27001#27001.

> … So, Roy is lying—for surely Jafri is not. But what about the hundreds of media lies that haven't been exhumed as yet? Her seven-page long (approx. 6,000 words) hate charter against India and the *Sangh Parivar* is woven around just two specific cases of human tragedy, one of which—by now, we know for sure—is a piece of fiction. The rest is hyperbole, punctuated with venom and vitriol to demonise the *Parivar*. Precisely this type of demonisation had resulted in the macabre incident at Godhra. The vicious propaganda unleashed by the secularists for over a decade had made ordinary and gullible Muslims see the innocent *Ramsevaks* as demons who deserved to be burnt alive.[5]

The Misinformation Machinery

Here is an illustrative example of how every word that Modi uttered following the Godhra incident was twisted and distorted by the well-oiled misinformation machinery set up by the Congress and the Left. One of the early charges against Modi was that when post-Godhra riots broke out, he justified and legitimised violence against Muslims thus proving his complicity. This mischief started with an incomplete statement telecast on Zee TV based on an interview conducted by Zee correspondent Sudhir Chaudhary. Modi's exact words were: "*Kriya pratikriya ki chain chal rahi hai. Hum chahte hain ki na kriya ho aur na pratikriya*." (A chain of action-reaction is going on. We want that there should be neither 'action' nor 'reaction'). But Zee TV deliberately left out the second sentence and presented the mischievously clipped first half of the statement to build a case that Modi had justified the post-Godhra riots as a legitimate reaction of Hindus against the killings of *karsevaks* at Godhra.

This statement was made to go viral by anti-Modi lobbies with active help of the national media despite repeated protests by Modi that he was being misquoted. What the country's premier newspaper *The Times of India* did with this statement was a new low in the history of Indian journalism. On March 3, 2002, *The Times of India* splashed on its front page in question-answer form, certain fabricated statements attributed to Modi including the same "action-reaction" statement to build a case that Modi had justified anti-Muslim riots.

When this news item misquoting Modi appeared in *The Times of India*, the state government immediately sent a protest letter to the editor of the

5 Balbir K. Punj, "Fiddling with Facts as Gujarat Burns," *Outlook India*, May 27, 2002, *Web*. http://www.outlookindia.com/printarticle.aspx?215755.

paper stating that the CM had not been interviewed by *TOI* nor had he justified the violence in the words attributed to him. When the *TOI* did not publish the correction issued by the CM's office, a BJP leader went to meet the *TOI* editor who asked them to send the facts in writing, which was done promptly. But the *TOI* still didn't publish the clarification issued by Modi. It was brought to the notice of the editor twice in writing before Modi's clarification was published on March 23, a good 20 days after the original story was published on March 3, 2002. What is worse, while the inflammatory misquote attributed to Modi was splashed on the front page of *TOI* in both the national as well as in the Ahmedabad editions, the clarification by Modi's office was published in a remote corner in the inside pages of the newspaper.

In the meantime, the quote attributed to Modi had been spiced up with gory add-ons and sinister interpretations. It was circulated all over the world with such fierce speed that it acquired a life of its own. Even the clean chit given to Modi by the Supreme Court appointed and monitored Special Investigate Team (SIT) in 2010-11 has not halted its viral spread and endless repetition.

When the SIT questioned Zee TV Correspondent Sudhir Chaudhary to verify the charge leveled by Teesta Setalvad & Co., Chaudhary said, he had attended a press conference held by Narendra Modi on March 1, 2002, in the Circuit House at the outskirts of Gandhinagar and requested a short interview from the CM. The latter agreed and was interviewed for about 10 minutes.[6]

When Chaudhary questioned the CM about the Gulberg Society massacre in which the former Congress MP, Ehsan Jafri, was killed along with more than 50 others, the chief minister in his reply referred to the reports that Jafri had first fired at the violent mob, which apparently infuriated the crowd further. Thereafter, the mob stormed the Gulberg Society and set it on fire.[7]

According to Chaudhary, Narendra Modi referred to Jafri's firing as "action" and the massacre that followed as "reaction". However, he could not provide a satisfactory explanation why in the Zee TV telecast, the last

6 Special Investigation Team (SIT), *Report in Compliance to the Order Dated 12.09.2011 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the Complaint dated 08.06.2006 of Smt. Jakia Nasim Ahesan Jafri*, p. 188.

7 ibid., p. 187.

line—"*Hum chahte hai ki na kriya ho aur na pratikriya*"—was deliberately omitted.

During investigations, the SIT sent formal requisitions to Zee TV to make available a copy of the CD of the television interview of Narendra Modi conducted by Sudhir Chaudhary on March 1, 2002. Despite two reminders and a notice u/s 91 Cr.P.C. sent to Zee TV, the CD was not made available to the SIT. Sudhir Chaudhary said in his testimony to the SIT that the chief minister was of the view that he wanted neither action nor reaction. But this admission, coming years later, was not telecast and propagated the way the mischievous half-statement had been. What is worse, Sudhir Chaudhary continues to reiterate even today that Modi had justified the 2002 riots.

When Narendra Modi was questioned about the same interview given to Zee TV, he told the SIT that those who have read the history of Gujarat would know that communal violence in the state has a long history. There had been numerous communal riots in previous decades. But, as far as the riots of 2002 or the Zee TV interview of March 1, 2002 were concerned, "He had always appealed only and only for peace and had issued several appeals to the people to shun violence in straight and simple language. If his words cited in response to this question are considered in the correct perspective, then it would be evident that there is a very earnest appeal for people refraining from any kind of violence."[8]

Narendra Modi told the SIT that *The Times of India* had published a news item on March 3, 2002, pretending as though he had given an interview to them whereas nobody from the newspaper had met him for an interview. The *TOI* reporter had cooked up the story on the basis of his own surmises and was prominently splashed on the front page of the newspaper. It was his considered opinion that violence cannot be countered by violence. He did not, and would never justify any action or reaction by a mob against innocents.[9]

Not surprisingly, the SIT reached the following conclusion: "No case is made against Narendra Modi because even though during the riots ghastly violent attacks had taken place on Muslims at Gulberg Society, Naroda Patia, and elsewhere by unruly mobs, yet the alleged statements made by Chief Minister Narendra Modi appeared to have been quoted out of context."[10]

8 ibid., pp. 188-89.
9 ibid., pp. 187-88.
10 ibid., p. 99.

The full text of the SIT report clearly shows that this exoneration is based on examining, not just the veracity of the controversial remarks of that day, but also various other statements and speeches Modi made in the days following the Godhra incident. In addition, the SIT also examined the actual actions of the state government. Since the newspapers and TV channel that misquoted Modi refused to rectify their mistake, the mischievous misquote acquired a life of its own and has been continually used as part of a smear campaign even after the SIT established that there was deliberate distortion by the media in this matter. Even today, the website of Teesta Setalvad's *Communalism Combat* carries the allegation that:

> The conduct of the chief executive of the state of Gujarat, Modi, was more like a partisan *pracharak* of the RSS than a constitutionally elected chief minister "*Har kriya ki pratikriya hoti hai,*" he had first said, justifying the premeditated carnage that followed Godhra. "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction." He simply failed to reassure five crore people in the state that he is a guardian of their lives and property. Instead of responding with responsibility, he kept making callous assurances that everything was normal.[11]

Modi's Instant Appeal for Peace

That Modi's testimony to SIT was not cooked up as an afterthought to save his skin, is evident from a series of press statements and appeals on Doordarshan issued by Narendra Modi during that period. Just as Modi's statements following the killing of Hindus in Godhra on February 27 do not have a trace of anti-Muslim demagoguery[12], similarly, his statements during the riots are all aimed at calming tempers and not provoking inter-community hatred or enmity. For instance, on February 28, 2002, Narendra Modi released the following personal peace appeal in a Gujarati broadcast across the state on Doordarshan at 7 p.m. It was repeatedly broadcast thereafter on the same evening.[13]

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11 "Indictment: Government of Gujarat," *Communalism Combat*, March-April 2002, p. 107.

12 See chapter 12.

13 I've translated Narendra Modi's peace appeal on February 28, 2002, verbatim in English. The Hindi version with English subtitles is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIRMR8zW0iI. (The YouTube translation is stylistically somewhat different from mine, even though there is no difference in the overall content.)

Yesterday in Godhra, an inhuman tragedy struck. More than 40 women and children were burnt to death. 18 men were also burnt alive. In all, 58 people were trapped inside a rail bogie and mercilessly massacred by cannibals. Such a heinous crime will bring tears to the eyes of the most hard-hearted person. This devilish and inhuman act committed in the land of Gujarat cannot be tolerated in any civilised society. This crime cannot be forgiven. I want to assure the people of Gujarat that something like this will never be tolerated. The culprits will be appropriately punished for the crime they have committed.

Not only that, we will set an example so that in future no one will dare commit such a heinous act. The government of Gujarat is committed to the protection of all its citizens. Those who take law into their hands and destroy the lives of innocent people have no place in a civilised society. I share the grief of the people of Gujarat. For any humanist, such an incident would cause indescribable grief. But, at the same time, creating disturbances (*ashanti*), indiscipline, and expressing outrage (*akrosh*) is not the solution.

Violating the law and venting your anger by indulging in riots cannot be tolerated in any civilised society. I understand your feelings but I pray to you that the need of the hour is to maintain peace and self-restraint. We are determined to punish those who have committed this crime. No one will escape their due punishment. Won't you help the government in saving Gujarat? Won't you help us in maintaining peace and harmony? The government of Gujarat appeals to you for help, appeals to you for *shanti* (peace) and *sanyam* (restraint/self-discipline).

In the midst of this *akrosh* (deep outrage), it is my humble request that in such a testing time Gujarat expects from you what it is best known for. **There are numerous examples of how Gujarat has maintained peace and harmony during the most adverse of times. I want to remind you of this unique characteristic of Gujarat–of showing restraint and maintaining peace during adversities. Let us serve Gujarat by maintaining shanti and sanyam.** Let us strengthen the arms of law. Let us create an atmosphere that will ensure the most severe punishment for the perpetrators of this heinous crime. I am confident that my solemn appeal will touch your hearts. Let me assure you that everyone in the government feels the shock and pain experienced by you. We feel the same intensity of pain as you do.

Even the prime minister [Atal Bihari Vajpayee] is deeply disturbed by these developments and so is the home minister of India. The entire country has expressed solidarity with Gujarat and shares our grief. But the responsibility to maintain peace, harmony and restraint is *ours*. **I understand your anger**

and outrage; I understand your pain. And yet, in the self-interest of Gujarat, and to ensure that we don't jeopardise the future of Gujarat, that Gujarat doesn't get a blot on its face or carry a stigma connected with these times, all the 5 crore Gujaratis need to keep calm and exercise self-restraint.

I also want to express my gratitude to you that in the midst of so much anger, out of the 18,000 villages of Gujarat, disturbances have broken out only in a handful of them. Largely, there is an atmosphere of peace. However, the incidents that have occurred in the cities of Gujarat are disturbing. **It is my appeal to you, tit-for-tat is not a solution. Ver ver thi shamtu nathi (hatred is never won over by hatred).I am not here to give you sermons. But I see the bright future of Gujarat. For its sake, I urge you to help the government in maintaining peace.** The government seeks your help in punishing the guilty through the due process of law. The government seeks your help in creating an environment of peace so that the law can take its own course.

I have full faith that the people of Gujarat will respond to my appeal and will work together for a peaceful Gujarat. It is our responsibility to ensure that innocents do not suffer or lose their lives. Come, let us together work for establishing peace. Again, let me assure you that I share your grief and pain. However, let us come together to strengthen the hands of law so that the guilty get the severest punishment due to them to set a historic example. Once again, I appeal to the people of Gujarat for peace. *Jai jai garvi Gujarat mantra jeevant karne ke liye hame shanti ka marg hi chahiye.* In order to instill life into the *mantra* of Jai Garvi Gujarat, we need to follow the path of peace. [Emphasis mine]

It is beyond comprehension how anyone can find fault with this speech. Even the body language and facial expressions of Modi in the video are sombre and sad—far away from the kind of devilish reaction attributed to him.

Follow up Peace Appeals

It isn't just this one speech. Throughout the months of March and April, Modi kept issuing similar peace appeals, no matter which platform he spoke from. I reproduce below extracts from press releases issued by the state government and key extracts from his speeches.

March 1, 2002: "Verify before printing/broadcasting—do not spread false news… Do not mention names of communities as per established

press ethics and practices—to stop the spreading of violence … Do not show visuals of the dead people to avoid emotional flare-ups leading to violence… There will be no compromise in the law and order situation. Gujarat's peace and tranquility will not be allowed to be disturbed by anti-social elements who intend to exploit the people's anger/feelings... Restoring peace is our topmost priority. We will act strongly against those disturbing peace." (Source: CM Press Release)

"Orders for shoot-at-sight have been issued to deal strictly with the people involved in violence." (Source: CM Press Release)

March 2, 2002: "The interest of Gujarat lies in peace and not in communal tension or disturbances… The State government is committed to pacify the widespread anger amongst the people and restore law and order with strong political will... No one will be allowed to take law into their own hands and strict directives have been given to deal very firmly with all those provoking the people and all such elements trying to disturb the atmosphere…" (Source: CM Press Release).

"I appeal to people to cooperate with the security staff in order to maintain law and order and in performance of their duties…. The government cannot shy away from its moral duty of maintaining law and order in the state." (Source: *Sandesh/Gujarat Samachar*)

March 3, 2002: "March is the month of examinations and, therefore, I appeal to parents, guardians, and educationists to help restore peace quickly and keep the atmosphere stress-free so that all examinations are finished in time… After the earthquake of last year and riots, now we do not wish to see the future of lakhs of students of the state turning into despair..." (Source: *Gujarat Samachar*)

"The government cannot shy away from its moral duty of maintaining law and order in the state… all sections of the society too have a role to play in restoring peace quickly… I appeal to people to cooperate with the security staff in order to maintain law and order and in performance of their duties…" (Source: CM Press Release)

March 6, 2002: "Society cannot progress in an atmosphere of revenge and in violating law and order with impunity whatsoever may be the provocation, as this does not behove a civilised society… Government is determined to award exemplary punishment to the culprits." (Source: CM Speech Press Release at a meeting with social leaders in Ahmedabad)

March 7, 2002: "The violence that erupted after the Godhra incident does not behove any civilised society. The need of the hour in Gujarat is love for each other, not spreading rumours; enlightened citizens need to play a pro-active role for establishing peace in their respective areas." (Source: CM Press release)

March 8, 2002: "The State government has planned peace rallies all over the state to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, safety, and peace." (Statement during a visit to riot-affected areas of Surat)

March 10, 2002: "This government will not spare offenders involved in disturbing peace." (Source: *Gujarat Samachar*)

"People have entrusted me with the responsibility of keeping the state free from elements intent on dragging Gujarat into a vortex of communal disturbances. I will strengthen law and order with a strong administrative will." (At a meeting with cloth merchants of Maskati market, Ahmedabad. reported in *Sandesh*)

March 14, 2002: "I appeal to everyone not to be swayed by rumours and work for peace." (Source: CM Press Release, Ahmedabad)

March 18, 2002: When the CM was asked, "What is your personal assurance to the Muslim community", he replied: "Safety and social harmony is my assurance. My government is as much theirs as of anyone else… The Godhra incident was painful; but it does not mean it is right for anyone to take law into his hands on the specious plea that it is a reaction to what happened in Godhra. In a democracy, there are always ways to express one's feelings, howsoever strong. Rule of Law is supreme… there is no place for retributive justice (post-Godhra) in a civilised society… I had ordered shoot-at-sight to curb violence just before I left Godhra to curb violence…. Religious, social, and political leaders will have to work together in bringing back mutual trust within their communities…. I have not taken a single reproachable step. When people realise the truth, they will know that my government will not spare anyone responsible for violence." (*The Hindustan Times,* New Delhi)

March 22, 2002: "Ahmedabad is now returning to the path of peace but there are dark forces bent upon disturbing the city's peace and tranquility. The security forces need to be alert to prevent recurrence of communal flare-up, which has once again reared its ugly head. Those disturbing the peace are inimical to the society at large…Law is common to one and all and no violator of law will go unpunished by exploiting loopholes in law." (CM Press release)

Creation of Distorted Discourse

There is a clearly discernible pattern in how the discourse on Gujarat riots was distorted to demonise Modi. In all the early reports of newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Telegraph,* quoted in the chapters on post-Godhra riots, there were no allegations against Narendra Modi or the Gujarat government at the time when reporters were sending eyewitness accounts. Even Doordarshan news reported on March 3, 2002, in its night bulletin: "Violence has ended in a record time in Ahmedabad… only 3 days…. In the past, it would take many weeks… Today (Sunday), curfew was relaxed, people bought items from bazaar…"

Newspapers spoke of police lapses as well as instances where police or the army saved lives. They also talked about the sheer inadequacy of the police force available to handle the mass outrage, which brought thousands of people—cutting across party divides—out on the streets at several places simultaneously to revenge the Godhra carnage.

But within days, the narrative started getting manipulated as though an invisible hand was guiding it in the direction of targeting Narendra Modi as the evil genius who personally masterminded the massacre. This line of argument became so aggressive and entrenched that when in 2010, the SIT report did not fall in line with those targeting Modi, SIT members came in for vicious personal attack and slander. They were accused of having been bought over by Narendra Modi. Teesta & Co. launched a full-fledged campaign for disbanding the SIT and replacing it with a fresh inquiry.

It is worth asking why the SIT report and various court orders that came before and after the SIT clearing Modi's name have not altered the tone or tenor of the hate campaign carried out by leading journalists, NGO activists, and jet-setting academics. Why do journalists keep flinging the same set of questions to Modi and repeating the same charges *ad nauseam* totally ignoring the outcomes of court cases and the SIT report?

The Skullcap Controversy

One of the oft-repeated "proofs" offered by secularists of Modi's alleged hatred of Muslims is that he refused to wear a skullcap offered to him by a Muslim during his *Sadbhavana Yatra*. How the media went overboard in distorting this incident, is explained by Ahmedabad-based businessman Zafar Sareshwala:

> That controversy over the skullcap was nonsense, a nonstarter. I don't know how the media can give importance to such issues and distort them so badly. In any case, that kind of skullcap is more associated with the Jews than with Muslims. From the point of view of Islam, the skullcap has no importance. If you go to any Arab country, you won't find a single Muslim wearing a skullcap during namaz. Even so, I asked that man who had offered the skullcap during one of Sadhbhavna meetings, what had actually happened that day. He told me, "*Modi ne aise koi utaar nahin di, bola topi mat pehnao, lao shawl de do green wali*." (It is not as if Modi removed the skullcap from his head. He just said: don't put a cap on me, give me that green shawl you have for me.) I further asked that man if Modi had abused him when refusing the skullcap. He said, "No. Modi simply said, 'don't put the cap on me, give me the shawl.'"

Asifa Khan, a former Congress Party leader from Bharuch who joined the BJP in December 2012, told me, "The shawl was actually more Islamic because it had Koranic verses (*kalma*) written on it." I checked this fact in photographs of the event. They clearly show a Muslim draping a green shawl with Arabic verses from the *Koran* printed all over the shawl.[14]

Zafar says, "I did ask Modi, why did you not wear the cap?" He said, "*Topi musalmano ka chinh hai ya wo hari shawl? Doosri baat, kya aapko Congress ne topyian kam pehnai har Iftaar parties mein? Iftaari jab hoti hai, har politician topi pehenta hai aur musalman khush ho jaate hain*." (Tell me, is the green shawl with Koranic verses written on it more of a symbol of Islam or the skullcap? Secondly, have the Muslims not had enough of skullcaps being donned by Congressmen during Iftaar parties? During these ceremonial occasions, all the politicians come wearing skullcaps and Muslims feel elated at just that!)

Asifa Khan says she had issued a press statement explaining what had actually transpired, "but the media refuses to take notice of any fact that portrays Modi in a good light. They go on and on reiterating the same distortion to attack him. That is why Modi has stopped paying heed to what the media says."

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14 I have posted the photograph of Narendra Modi accepting a green shawl with Islamic verses written on it during Sadhbhavana Yatra in my article: Madhu P. Kishwar, "Of Skullcap, Miyan Musharraf and Modi's Sadbhavana Yatra," *Manushi*, April 9, 2013, http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1698&ptype=campaigns&pgno=3#.UxBlefSSxJM.

Zafar had asked Modi whether he could give the correct version publicly. Modi told him, "You are free to say it. But I won't bother to offer explanations because the media is determined to distort all I say." Zafar says, he explained all this on TV but "they just don't pay heed and keep repeating the same lie over and over again that Modi insulted Muslims by refusing to wear the skullcap." Here is another instance of orchestrated distortion by the media following his June 12, 2013, interview to *Reuters*[15], which kicked up a huge political storm. Among other things, the reporter asked Modi:

> **Is it frustrating that many people still define you by 2002?**
> People have the right to be critical. We are a democratic country. Everyone has their own view. I would feel guilty if I did something wrong. Frustration fills in when you think 'I got caught. I was stealing and I got caught.' That's not my case.
> **Do you regret what happened?**
> I'll tell you. India's Supreme Court is considered a good court today in the world. The Supreme Court created a Special Investigative Team (SIT), which is very bright and has a clean image. Another thing, if we are in a car … and someone else is driving [that] car and we're sitting behind, even then if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course it will be. I'm a human being, after all. If something bad happens anywhere, it is natural to be sad.

Any common-sense reading of this statement indicates the following sentiment: "I would be pained even if a small animal got inadvertently hurt by my car while I was in the back seat. Why would I not feel pain and anguish at the death of so many innocents?" Modi's own tweet following the manufactured outrage over his remark put it in perspective: "In our culture, every form of life is valued and worshipped. People are the best judge." But every single TV anchor, every single political commentator went hammer and tongs at Modi for having referred to Muslims as "dogs". Congress spokesperson Ajay Maken pompously declared, "It is reflective of his perverse mindset. It is totally against the idea of India." The CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat lambasted Modi for 'justifying and trivialising' the

15 Interview with BJP leader Narendra Modi, *Reuters*, July 12, 2013, http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2013/07/12/interview-with-bjp-leader-narendra-modi/.

2002 riots, saying he was not ready even now to express regrets for it. Even after the SIT clean chit, Karat thundered, "It is utterly shameful that he is justifying the genocide and using inappropriate examples and analogies to trivialise the enormity of it."

This was repeated with such Goebbelsian ferocity on TV and in print media that today in every Muslim *basti*, in every Muslim village, even little Muslim children have had it dinned into their heads that Modi thinks Muslims are worse than dogs.

Partisan Role of Media Monitors

The partisan role played by our national media is also evident from the fact that the Editors Guild of India appointed a team headed by Dileep Padgaonkar and Aakar Patel, who have been leading members of the Smear Modi Campaign, to study the media coverage of riots. This team in its 254-page report[16] castigated the role of certain Gujarati newspapers, notably *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar,* for 'provocative and irresponsible' coverage of the Godhra incident and subsequent riots in the state. They describe at length the problems faced by the NDTV team. But the Guild team had nothing to say about the provocative role of *The Times of India*, NDTV and numerous others in the national media in fanning the flames.

The Guild's condemnation of Modi is not based on any serious investigation. Every act of violence is attributed to Modi's complicity even when the guilt lay squarely at the door of Congressmen. For instance, the report says: "Mr. Modi had no explanation for the widespread destruction of Muslim dargahs and shrines, and how it was that in at least one case the rubble had been cleared and a tarred road built upon the site…Tarring of a road is a major operation and calls for organisation, mechanical equipments and efforts beyond the capacity of stray hoodlums."

If the Guild members had done even the most elementary investigation, Muslims would have told them that the Congress Party's Himmat Singh Patel, who was then the Mayor of Ahmedabad, executed this job. He not only egged on mobs to vandalise the *mazar* and a nearby mosque but personally ensured that the very next day a bulldozer ran over the two religious structures to level the ground and build a road on them.

16 Aakar Patel, Dileep Padgaonkar and B.G. Varghese, "Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report," *Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat* Editors Guild, New Delhi, 2002.

While on one hand, the Guild report is silent about the role of the Congress Party in the riots; on the other hand, every hoodlum action of VHP and Bajrang Dal cadre is put in Modi's account as though they were his private militia. A responsible journalist would take the trouble to distinguish between the official acts of Modi as the chief minister from the conduct of some of his party colleagues as well as organisations that might be in alliance with the BJP on select issues. The truth is that these outfits flourished under previous Congress and BJP regimes, and have been marginalised in Gujarat only after Narendra Modi acquired a good grip over the administration.

The Editors Guild is also inaccurate in presenting the press statements issued by the Chief Minister's Office. By contrast, the report of a team headed by former Chief Justice of Punjab & Haryana High Courts, Justice D.S.Tewatia, took the national media to task and concluded that Gujarati newspapers were by and large 'more factual' in their reporting than the national press. But this report did not get even a fraction of the attention given to the Editors Guild report; leave alone the media hype given to inquiries stage managed by anti Modi NGOs. Here are some extracts from the summary of the report[17] presented by Justice Tewatia:

- Repeated telecasts of arson and violence contributed in spreading the tension to unaffected areas. TV channels ignored warning from officials and kept telecasting communal riots like infotainment. Coverage of Machhipiti in Vadodara is an example. One national news channel went overboard to telecast police firing at Machhipit as if it had taken place in Ahmedabad.
- The code of ethics prescribed by the Press Council of India was violated by the media with impunity. It so enraged the citizens that several concerned citizens in the disturbed areas suggested that peace could return to the state only if some of the TV channels were closed for some weeks. English language media, particularly the Delhi Press, is perceived by the Gujaratis to be biased. The information disseminated by it was neither balanced nor impartial.
- By converting half-baked news stories into major headlines, print as well as electronic media widened the psychological hiatus between Muslims and Hindus. By disseminating half-truths and lies, the media played no mean role in distorting the country's image in the world… The

17 Justice D. S. Tewatia et al., *Godhra Carnage-Justice Tewatia Report*, pp. 25-34.

credibility of the media—both electronic and print—is at a dangerously low ebb in Gujarat….

- Local and regional papers at times seemed to be emotionally surcharged and lost sight of objectivity. However, Gujarati newspapers, by and large, were factual in day-to-day reporting. The editorial pages of local and regional newspapers maintained a balance in projecting all viewpoints.
- Newspapers published in English from Delhi invariably editorialised the news. Direct and indirect comments in the news writing were so telling that the personal likes and dislikes of the news reporters were too obvious to be missed.
- English language newspapers published from Delhi appeared to have assumed the role of crusaders against the State government from day one. It coloured the entire operation of newsgathering, feature writing, and editorials.
- The edit pages of English language press carried comments that clearly indicated biases:
  a) Against the State government of Gujarat;
  b) In favour of Congress, Leftist parties, and the secularist intellectuals;
  c) Indifference to the carnage at Godhra;
  d) Against the Hindu organisations; and
  e) Against the NDA government at the Centre.
- Most of the national newspapers and news channels played down the intensity of the Godhra carnage and projected it as a result of provocation by pilgrims. Not many reporters were deputed to dig out facts or to do follow-up stories. This resulted in a large number of editorials and articles projecting Godhra as a 'reaction to the provocation by *karsevaks*' and riots in the rest of Gujarat as 'state-sponsored terrorism.'
- A distorted image of sectarian violence in the state was projected by the electronic and print media based in Delhi.
- On February 27, 2002, the government of Gujarat announced a compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs for the next of kin of victims of the Godhra carnage. There were protests about discrimination between Hindu and Muslim victims, and the government announced on March 9, that all the victims would get Rs. 1 lakh. Yet, as late as the first week of April, a Congressperson in USA cited a report in an Indian newspaper to accuse the government of discriminating against minorities in the grant of compensation. The newspaper concerned did not care to inform its readers of the correct situation.

- Media did not help to cool down tempers. It failed to act as a platform for dialogue between the Hindus and Muslims on the one hand and between the people and the establishment on the other.
- Telecasting images that spread hatred and instigated violence is unhealthy, but their repeated telecast is lethal. The media acted as an interested party in the confrontation, not a neutral reporter of facts.

The team was alarmed at the intensity of anger among the people of the state at Delhi-based newspapers and television news channels. This attitude was especially articulated by delegations of intellectuals, lawyers, doctors, and businessmen that met Justice Tewatia's team. Even the tribals complained that the media had no time to hear their tales of agony and was spreading canards against the Hindus.

Pilloried for Taking Godhra Carnage Seriously

One cannot help but get the impression that Modi's sympathy for those who were charred to death by anti-social elements at Godhra was held against him as a cardinal crime. An even more cardinal crime was that his government took prompt action and arrested and put on trial those who led or masterminded the Godhra killings.

The fact that Modi did not try to underplay the seriousness of Godhra incident and condemned it as an example of anti-national activity made enemies of all those whose politics thrives on garnering the Muslim vote bank through inculcating a sense of permanent victimhood in such ways that even if Muslim criminals and terrorists are nabbed, they cry foul and dub it as an instance of anti-Muslim bias. It is the same mind-set that defends Kashmiri secessionists, guilty of unleashing ethnic cleansing of Hindus in the Valley but have never taken up the cause of Kashmiri Pandits, even though they were ousted from their homeland through violence and terror.

The media tried bulldozing Modi into de-linking the post-Godhra riots and the Godhra incident but because he did not yield to that pressure, he was painted as a Hindu bigot.

Furore over Modi's Refusal to Apologise

Another favourite song of Modi baiters is that he has never once apologised or expressed regret for the riots. This too is held as "proof" that Modi is not only guilty for the 2002 riots, but wears it as a badge of honour. Apart from all the above quoted statements, Modi's speech in the very

first assembly session in March 2002 is full of anguish over the riots and centred around the following sentiment: "Are we not supposed to soul-search ourselves? Whether it is the Godhra incident or post-Godhra, it does not enhance the prestige of any civilised society. The riots are a stigma on humanity and do not help anyone to hold his head high. Then why is there a difference of opinion?"

In an interview to NDTV broadcast on March 20, 2004, Narendra Modi said to Shekhar Gupta, the editor of *The Indian Express*, "You all wanted that someone be made a scapegoat. I did not do that. I allowed you to break all pots on my head alone. You have all decided-all these riots happened under this man (Narendra Modi). Until this man is removed from the chief minister's post, we will not rest in peace. My best wishes to you in your mission."

Narendra Modi did not resign, and the BJP did not dismiss him. This was dexterously used by the Congress Party's allies within media organisations to run an incessant no-holds barred hate campaign against Modi and the BJP. Given this determination to paint him in gory colours, is it any surprise that Modi decided to stop giving interviews to journalists or responding to hostile news reports? Modi told me the last straw for him with regard to NDTV was when one of their correspondents, Vijay Trivedi, accompanied him in a helicopter for an interview. When he started asking the same old insulting questions, Modi simply kept quiet and refused to respond any further. Piqued at Modi's ignoring him, Trivedi spread the canard that Modi nearly threw him out of the helicopter mid-air because he had asked tough questions.[18] Modi says on that day he decided never to give legitimacy to NDTV by giving them an interview or responding to any questions from them. Vijay Trivedi treats this incident as a badge of honour. In one of the articles written by Anando Bhakto for *The Sunday Indian* on December 16, 2001, Vijay Trivedi is reported to have bragged:

> The two high points of my career have been when I, in 2005, reported from Pakistan about the Jinnah remark made by Lal Krishna Advani (which led to his resignation as the BJP president), and then during the 2009 election campaign when, while travelling in Narendra Modi's aircraft, I asked him if

18 "Chakravyuh with Narendra Modi," *NDTV*, May 2, 2009. *Web*. http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/chakravyuh/chakravyuh-with-narendra-modi/72774.

> he would like to apologise for the Godhra riots. That left him totally baffled and he was not able to say anything at all.[19]

This is clearly out of sync with Modi's version. But journalists feel they don't need to observe the slightest caution about accuracy or honesty when reporting about Modi. Throwing muck at Modi has become such a lucrative career option that many have taken to it as a full-time mission. For the last 12 years, TV channels and print media have condemned him non-stop in absentia. They keep getting more and more hysterical because he stopped even responding to them and instead took to social media to get his message across.

As far as Modi's refusal to apologise is concerned, it is hard for any rational mind to take objection to the stand he has taken. The statement he made in response to UTV reporter Hindol Sengupta's[20] insistence on apology has been reiterated on many occasions:

> If I have done anything wrong, I go a step ahead and say I want punishment. In India, don't give chance to culprits, punish them! If Modi has committed a crime, he should be sent to the gallows. Why are you insisting on letting Modi get away with an apology? Why are you so keen on forgiving Modi? What is your interest? This should never be done. Modi should be given such a severe punishment that the point is driven home to 100 crore people of India…so that for the next 100 years no one commits such mistakes again. Friend, do not start this *chakkar* (campaign) of forgiving Modi. I say it bluntly, please don't do this campaign. Campaign for punishing Modi if found guilty…

It takes no courage to give the kind of phony and belated apology that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh offered for the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs by Congress Party without punishing a single Congress leader who led the riotous mobs. But, Modi's willingness to face the toughest trial shows conviction of his innocence and confidence in his integrity. This can't be held against him as a sign of complicity or lack of remorse.

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19 Anand Bhakto, "Beware of His Chakravyuh," *The Sunday Guardian*, December 16, 2011, *Web.* http://www.thesundayindian.com/article_print.php?article_id=27307.

20 Talk Back, "CM Interview," *UTV*, 5 May 2009. *Web.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voN5iQOPlE0>.

CHAPTER 17

Did Muslims Vote for BJP out of Fear in 2012?

Gujarati Muslims as Game Changers in Indian Politics

And strangely enough (my Muslim brethren will forgive me for saying so), the most safe place for Muslims today is Gujarat, only because its Chief Minister Mr. Narendra Modi has "banned" entry to the Intelligence Bureau (IB) in Gujarat….After "banning" IB, the Muslim atrocities in Gujarat have stopped. That is what is required to be done if we want to put a full stop to fake encounters, false terror attacks, their fabricated investigations and arrests of innocent Muslim boys...

S.M. Mushrif, Former IG of Police in *Milli Gazette* on May 27, 2013.

The Congress Party gave nothing but riots, gambling dens, and bootlegging mafias to the Muslim community. They did nothing for our community in the field of education. That is why Muslims remained backward under Congress regimes.

AI Syed, Chairman, Gujarat Waqf Board

Today Muslims don't feel discriminated against even though no development scheme has come in the name of minorities. Everything is in the name of Gujaratis. But muslims have benefited equally. This is national integration in the real sense. The Muslims who have come to BJP will prove to be game changers for India.

Asifa Khan from Bharuch, spokesperson BJP.

Since Modi's appointment as CM had attracted national attention, his victory in Rajkot in the February 2002 election with the overwhelming support of Muslim community, should have been noticed by the media outside Rajkot and Gujarat. However, all those media persons who accused Modi of "genocide" within days of this historic election alleging

that hating Muslims was part of Modi's DNA, never said a word about the enormous goodwill displayed by Muslims of Rajkot for Modi.[1]. This couldn't possibly be a case of ignorance or oversight on the part of our leading journalists.

It took Modi ten years to create a new record for the BJP by winning the 2012 assembly elections with 31 per cent Muslims voting for BJP. He succeeded despite a ten year long high voltage national and global campaign against him, branding him a fascist, a butcher of Muslims, and an inherently "divisive" force in Indian politics. However, instead of feeling relieved at the bridging of the communal divide in Gujarat, the increase in Muslim votes for BJP was dismissed with disdain by Modi-haters, including reputed political scientists like my CSDS (Centre for Studies of Developing Society) colleague, Yogendra Yadav, by saying that Muslims had voted for Modi out of fear.

In my forthcoming book, I will bring more detailed accounts from Muslim villages as to why there has been a tectonic shift of Muslim votes in favour of BJP. But for the time being, the account of Bharuch based Asifa Khan speaks volumes. Asifa joined the BJP a few weeks before the 2012 election after spending four years as the Congress spokesperson in Gujarat. Therefore, her joining the BJP created a real stir. She is respected not just by fellow Muslims, but also enjoys high prestige among the Hindus. Before she was handpicked by Congress stalwart Ahmed Patel to join the Congress Party as its spokesperson, she had made a name for herself in Gujarat as the first Muslim woman from Bharuch who established herself print journalism as well as national television. She took on the Congress spokesperson's job with enthusiasm, but quit the Congress after witnessing the party's disarray over the years.

The Muslim Disenchantment with the Congress

This is how Asifa describes her experience of being a Congress worker and why an increasing number of Muslims, including herself, are gravitating towards Modi's BJP:

> Being a journalist I got a chance to interact with many politicians and industrialists. Since I hail from Bharuch, and Ahmed Patel sahib also hails from the same district, he knew me for years as a renowned journalist of the area.

1 See chapters No. 8 and 9.

On account of my good repute, he handpicked me in 2008 as a spokesperson of the Congress Party in Gujarat as well as the media cell convener of the All India Mahila Congress. I do not recall him handpicking anyone else from our district and giving him/her such an important designation.

Without contesting any elections and without any political background—I was not even an ordinary member of the Congress Party—I was given such a major responsibility straight away. To my knowledge I did full justice to that responsibility. My job was media management for the Party, especially the publicity part. But I was not made to come face-to-face with the media. My job was behind the curtains. For example, when Rahul Gandhi was to come to Gujarat, I designed the programme for him. We gave him the concept of *Abhay Udaan* (fearless flight) and arranged for him to interact with the youth. We gave him questions to work on and the tentative list of problems the youth would like him to speak on. I planned every aspect of Rahul's visit, what he would be doing each day and how to bring attention to the issues we needed highlighted.

In the four years that I spent working for the Congress Party, I came to see that the hard-core issues and problems of people were not being addressed the way they needed to be. Congress lacks state level leadership in Gujarat, which means that any issue that comes up doesn't get solved at the local level. It is sent to a higher authority or to Delhi, and once the issue goes to Delhi, by the time the national leaders respond, it is too late to do anything about it.

Issues that are important at the grassroots level seem to be immaterial and treated as insignificant by the Congress Party in comparison to the "national" issues. Therefore, they are cast aside or remain unattended. This creates a boomerang effect at the grassroots level because people feel let down at their problems being ignored.

For instance, when a widow whose husband was employed in the postal department came to me with a genuine grievance, backed by documentary evidence, that the postal authorities had given her certain promises which they refused to honour, the issue could only be resolved at the Central government level. She came once, twice, and thrice. But since we could not solve her problem, we were not able to go and show our faces to her. She rightly carried the impression that the Congress party doesn't deliver.

When I went to Kutch to interact with the Muslims, they said that earlier they were with the Congress, but had moved over to the BJP because whenever they needed the slightest help of the Congress Party leaders in getting something done from the bureaucracy—whether big or small—they got no response. At times they could not even get an appointment with the local Congress

leaders; there is no one there to listen to citizens with grievances. But in the BJP they get a prompt hearing because its leaders are receptive and accessible. One Muslim shopkeeper told me that when he needed a municipal license to open a road side stall, a friend of his offered to take him to a BJP leader who promptly gave an appointment and sorted out the issue. He said, "Today, I am able to support my family because of the BJP leaders and the municipal councilor who helped me earn my living by getting me the required license. That is why I switched over to the BJP."

Another illustrative incident, among many others, in my hometown is that of a young Muslim boy running a small Chinese food kiosk. He joined the BJP way back in 2006. I asked him the reason and he explained saying, "See, I had a problem getting a hawker's license for my kiosk. I kept visiting various Congress leaders, including councilors, and yet got no help. I am the sole bread earner of a family of six. Ultimately, in sheer desperation, I sought the help of a friend to introduce me to the BJP MLA. This MLA promptly took me to the relevant department and sorted out my problem by getting me a license from the *nagarpalika* office. Now when my friend comes and requests me to put a BJP banner on my lorry, I agree whole-heartedly. I am here today because of my friend who took me to a BJP MLA."

Let me give you another example: When Muslims go for the Haj, they need to get some documents signed by a government representative holding an office of authority. People often go to their area's MLA for that. In my district, when Muslims try to get an appointment with a Congress Muslim MLA, they do not manage to get time from him, whereas when they call up a Hindu BJP MLA, they get a prompt response. They are called in immediately and the forms are signed promptly. These are indications of how the BJP is proving helpful to Muslims at the ground level. They are reaching out to Muslims and extending their hand of friendship; they are not arrogant. BJP leaders give you an appointment without much fuss and help you without any discrimination.

In Bharuch, during the 2012 municipal election, both the BJP and the Congress gave tickets to a Muslim candidate in a particular ward. But it is the BJP's Muslim candidate who won. This clearly shows that the BJP is being preferred by Muslims despite the fact that this particular area is part of Ahmed Patel sahib's political base. He is a big national leader. But he has no time to attend to his constituency's problems, while the local Congress team is dysfunctional. They just want to go for photo ops when the big national leaders arrive from Delhi. They are leaders just in name. That is why people are not voting for them in elections.

No wonder, then, that day-by-day the Congress is losing in this state. Why have they been out of power for the past 22 years? Out of eight Municipal Corporations in Bharuch district, seven Municipal Corporations are run by the BJP. The Congress is not functioning properly even at the district level. They won in very few zila parishads. All the others are with the BJP. Go further down, why is it that of the current taluka parishads in Gujarat, not even one is with the Congress? That means the party is finished at the ground level.

The Congress does not have a single credible face in Gujarat. That is why they are relying on BJP rejects. Did you hear any of the national leaders saying that this is the person that we are projecting as the chief minister? They didn't have a face till the last moment.

The Congress says that wherever Rahul ji went, they won the seats in that constituency. Then what stopped them from taking him all over Gujarat? All their national leaders proclaimed that they would win this time since wherever Rahul went he got them a seat. If they so desperately wanted Gujarat this time, what stopped them from taking him to 100 or 182 constituencies? This means that there is something dubious in the way they function. They took him only to places that they thought would save his face and stature.

If you descend on a state at the last moment, you won't get any response. You have to be there 365 days of the year to engage with people and to win their hearts. Modi ji is there with the people all the time; he attends numerous public events, constantly engages with his people, responds to their needs, and makes the administration work towards a purpose. And when he's there and keeps a watchful eye, the cabinet also works, the bureaucracy is also responsive, and the zila parishads and town councils also work. He calls himself a 24x7 CM 365 days a year. That is why he has been able to make the system work and change the face of Gujarat .

Why Asifa Khan Joined the BJP

Asifa says she did not join the BJP at the spur of the moment; she thought over it for a long time and took feedback from a large cross section of the Muslim community:

As a Muslim, I keenly observed that for the first time in decades there has been peace in the state. For 11 years there have been no riots, no curfews. As a field reporter I have seen riots very closely. The same Gujarat, that was unmanageable and constantly exploding, has become manageable under Narendrabhai. Whatever happened in 2002 was very unfortunate. But the Modi government

was only four months old at that time and he had absolutely no administrative experience. He started his journey as chief minister with a huge baggage of distrust and disenchantment with previous BJP governments. Among other challenges, he had to deal with messed-up relief and rehabilitation, following the devastating earthquake in 2001 and a long legacy of riots.

And yet in 2003 itself he came up with the Vibrant Gujarat movement. Right from day one, he was development-centric. He came up with major water projects like WASMO (Water & Sanitation Management Organisation). Muslims can see that his team is working and that there is no bias against them. Therefore, they started gravitating towards him.

The 2007 election was a major testing time for us. We saw that no communal issues were raised by the BJP. Even in the 2002 elections, Modi was focusing mainly on development. There were no attacks on Muslims but the media created needless furor over a phrase like "Miyan Musharraf." It was the Congress Party, which tried to play politics of communal hatred by using words like '*maut ka saudagar*' (merchant of death) for Modi ji. BJP did not use such communal rhetoric. This is what the Muslims are beginning to appreciate.

Remember, since 1947 there have been 11,000 small and big communal riots in Gujarat. Did any of the previous chief ministers undertake a *Sadbhavna* Mission (goodwill mission) or work for national integration? Mind you, Modi did not start the *Sadbhavna Yatra* in a vacuum. For years before that, he actually put it into practice. Because Modi brought peace, prosperity followed easily. When there is social harmony and stability, people like to work, study, and explore new job avenues. He opened many new educational and career advancement opportunities for Gujaratis. There has been all round development and Muslims are getting equal benefits. Today Muslims don't feel discriminated against even though no development scheme has come in the name of minorities. Everything is in the name of Gujaratis. When he brought the coastal development scheme, there were no special baits for OBCs, Muslims, or this or that section. But Muslims benefited equally. This is national integration in the real sense. All of us need to rise above narrow sectional identities and take pride in the collective development of all Gujaratis.

Even while I was in the Congress Party, I was watching all these developments. But as an opposition party, one's job is to blame and criticise the ruling BJP. I was expected to find faults with Mr. Modi and I couldn't find any. In fact, I started finding faults with my own leaders and questioning why we weren't doing what BJP was doing. I would ask them, why aren't we working for national integration? Why are we opposing Modi ji for doing it? We should

bring in schemes that benefit all. Why are we playing divisive politics based on caste or religion? Here is someone who is showing by example how to go about it! I think this minority labelling is a shameful game. We want to be treated as equals. That is what we are being ensured now. On this score, I was disappointed by the Congress again and again.

Someone in my shoes should never have left the Congress because they gave me a key position. The man closest to Sonia ji, her top-notch political advisor, was my mentor, my patron. I could have basked in the glory and stuck to it all my life. But I have chosen politics as a medium to serve my people, to attend to their grievances. I had the daring to say that this is wrong, that I don't like it. I had been communicating this to the national leaders off and on. But no one paid heed.

I told Ahmedbhai myself that BJP government was doing a good job; they brought hundreds of Muslims in as elected representatives at the panchayat, municipal, and district levels. Congress had been in power for nearly four decades. They never got as many Muslims elected in those long years as BJP has done in the last ten years.

Do you know that the Haj Committee and the Waqf Board of Gujarat were as good as defunct during Congress rule? The Party did not even bother to fill vacant positions. During Modi's tenure, all these Boards have been filled up and activated. Not only that, they have been given the status of full-fledged corporations which means we are given more funds, more powers, more autonomy to operate our Haj and Waqf Boards. They have become fully energised now. Even the Sachar Committee report said that the recommendations made by them have been implemented best in Gujarat as compared to any other state in the country. That committee was appointed by the Centre and yet it had to acknowledge the good work done by Gujarat. That is why I felt a strong urge to meet Modi ji.

I am the kind of person who avoids taking other people's help while seeking an appointment because I want to be judged on my own merit. So I decided to approach Modi ji directly. It was very easy to get an appointment. I just made a phone call to his office and left my name and number. I didn't even leave my designation. I just called him up as a Muslim woman from Bharuch and said that I want to meet him.

I got a call back and was given an appointment, which was scheduled for just five minutes. But those five minutes turned into 55. I didn't realise that I talked for so long. Nor did Modi ji point out to me that I had exceeded the time given to me. It was a one-on-one meeting. He listened to me very intently.

Many people were waiting outside to meet him. Only when I came out and looked at my watch did I realise that I had talked to him for nearly an hour. That is the moment I decided that I was going to work for him because I found his attitude extremely positive. In any case, he was already time-tested.

So I joined BJP in October 2012, just a month before the elections. I was told to handle my own press conference. He left it totally to me. Even other BJP leaders did not give me any instructions. If you watch that press conference, you will see for yourself that whatever I said came straight from my heart. Nobody gave me any directions. I got very high media coverage. I explained what I found admirable in the Modi government and the media was free to ask me any number of questions.

After that press conference I became an important media face for the BJP. It is noteworthy that while the party headquarters would ask me to appear for this or that media interview, press conference or a talk show on TV, I was never tutored to say this or that. It was marvelous to feel so trusted, especially for a new comer like me who had not been groomed by party leaders, who had not been trained in BJP's positions on various issues. I was given full freedom to say what I thought fit.

It was the same story during the election campaign meetings. For example, when Modi ji came to Vagra, I delivered the speech just before his address. This is a great compliment. You must hear that speech. The trust they reposed in me gave a new edge to my oratorical skills. I got phone calls from all over the country appreciating my speech. On the day of the 2012 election results, which was a big day for the BJP, I was asked by the party to sit live before a large gamut of TV channels. Right from 8 a.m. in the morning till 9.30 p.m., without any break, just a bit of water and a bit of *prasad* is all I had while appearing as BJP spokesperson on that historic day.

During my Congress days, I was not given such responsibilities. They knew that I was a press reporter and a public figure for 17-18 years. But they didn't utilise my skills, they used me only for behind-the-scenes work. After the elections of 2012, I got calls from the Congress Party saying, "You never did such work for us." I told them, you never asked me to do such things for you; it was the same Asifa Khan with you for four years. If you cannot utilise my potentials and talents, it isn't my fault. I did all you wanted me to do with full sincerity.

Because as a leader, Modi ji works hard and sincerely, everybody under him takes the cue from him. Why else would people come out in such large numbers to vote for BJP? The Muslims did so because they developed an active interest

in governance. In Bharuch, we have 38 per cent Muslim voters, while the Vagra constituency, where I stay, has 44 per cent Muslims. It was a Congress bastion for decades. The Congress was confident that even if they lost all of Gujarat, they would win in Vagra but not a single seat in Bharuch district, supposedly a stronghold of Ahmed Patel, went to the Congress. We took Ankleshwar, Jambusar, Bharuch, and Vagra. The Jaghadia seat went to JDU. *Inshallah*, in the next elections we will take back the JDU seat also.

Overall 31 per cent Muslims of Gujarat voted for the BJP. In the coming years, it is definitely going to increase. The Election Commission did the best job it could in Gujarat. Barring one small incident, there was no untoward incident anywhere in the state. This State doesn't witness the kind of disturbances that accompany elections in UP or Bihar. People came out on their own because they liked the leader and his style of governance.

This is how Zafar Sareshwala explained the electoral dynamics behind this shift in Muslim vote:

Bharuch has five constituencies, each of them with at least 20 per cent Muslim voters. One constituency, where a BJP candidate won, has 49 per cent Muslims. It is not as if all Hindus voted for the BJP. So, in Vagra, where the Congress candidate lost, it is not as if BJP won because all Hindus voted for it; at least 30 to 35 per cent of Hindus always vote for the Congress. That means Muslim vote played a crucial role in BJP's victory. Surat East has a constituency named Limbaya with a substantial Muslim vote but the Congress candidate there lost by 40,000 votes. In Jabalpur, where there are 62 per cent Muslims, 10,000 Muslim votes went to the BJP candidate who won. Prominent Muslims like Mehboob Ali Chishti, former Additional General of Police, Syed sahib, Asifa Khan, and Tyeba from Hyderabad worked very hard for Modi ji.

Muslim Exodus from Congress

Former Congressman, Sadat Bapu, a highly respected Muslim leader from Bharuch district who played an important role in swinging Muslim vote in favour of Modi says:

BJP has been reaching out to Muslims in a proactive manner; they held many public meetings in Muslim areas, something unheard of before. By contrast Congress takes Muslims for granted. Earlier, when BJP campaigned, Muslims were either hostile or indifferent. But in the 2012 election, BJP candidates held

> meetings in Muslim areas without security. The party is therefore winning the confidence of the community and attracting credible and talented Muslims. The Muslims who have come to BJP will prove to be game changers for India.

A more detailed account of Sadat Bapu's role will follow in my forthcoming book. Asifa Khan is in fact his protégé. Inamul Iraqi endorses Bapu Sadat and Zafar's point about BJP attracting far better talent among Muslims as compared to the Congress, by giving the example of ADG Police Syed who was fielded in the 2013 municipal elections. To quote Iraqi:

> When the BJP had projected former Additional Director General of Police Abdullah Ibrahim Syed as its candidate for the mayor's post in the 2013 municipal elections from the all-Muslim constituency of Juhapura, it had a very powerful impact on the community. About 3.5 lakh Muslims live there. Syed sahib secured over 40,000 Muslim votes though he could not win the election. This is, in itself, very incredible because BJP had never dared field candidates from such Muslim citadels, which the Congress guards zealously. It is not as if all those thousands voted out of fear or any compulsion. Two big public meetings were organised by the BJP in Juhapura, which saw the participation of thousands of Muslims each time.
>
> The Muslim mind is undergoing a sea change. Many prominent Muslims have moved over to the BJP, and the BJP is also taking Muslims more seriously. Hindu-Muslim relations have really improved in recent years. We treat each other as brothers. The credit for it goes in large part to our CM.

Several people in Juhapura told me that their vote went to Syed sahib primarily because of Modi. Had he been a more proactive candidate, he would have won hands down. This is how Syed sahib explains why he not only joined BJP after retirement but also campaigned actively for the Party in the 2012 assembly elections:

> I joined the BJP because I thought our politics is over-dominated by caste and religion. It needs to be infused with national spirit. I found Narendra Modi was doing exactly that. Despite their involvement in numerous such riots, Congressmen keep scaring the mullahs about the BJP. While serving in the police, I had seen, from close quarters, that the Congress has been fooling Muslims for too long. Muslims needed to be made aware of this and told the truth that the Congress Party gave nothing but riots, gambling dens,

and bootlegging mafias to the Muslim community. They did nothing for our community in the field of education. That is why Muslims remained backward under Congress regimes.

I was posted as deputy commissioner in Ahmedabad during the 1985 riots, which were organised by the Patel lobby within the Congress to oust Madhav Singh Solanki, who was also from the OBC caste. Solanki had won his second election with 148 MLAs. Despite that, he was not allowed to continue as chief minister. They used *bhai log* and dons for triggering the 1985 anti- caste riots in which the Muslim community got sucked in as a scapegoat.

The 1985 riot began in Dariapur. When I rushed there to investigate, I asked what had triggered the violence? I was told they happened due to a fight over kite flying. That was clearly bunkum because no one flies kites at night. When I investigated further it came out that don Abdul Lateef had been set up by Chimanbhai Patel who entrenched the process of criminalising politics in Gujarat. During the 1985 riots, we could not take out our uniforms for a whole month because we were on duty 24 hours a day. By contrast, in 2002 everything was brought under control within three days.

The 1969 riots were also engineered by Chimanbhai. Chief Minister Hitendra Desai made a very clever move and gave the Home Department to Jairam Patel. Immediately after taking over as home minister, one of the first orders Patel issued to the Ahmedabad police commissioner was to withdraw all weapons from all the police stations. Consequently, Commissioner Debu, a Parsi gentleman, held a meeting and instructed the police deputy commissioners of all zones to withdraw all the weapons from police stations and deposit them at the headquarters. A couple of officers objected to this right then. One of them was MJ Jadeja and the second one was Eric Renison. They were both disciplined cops but had the courage to speak up instead of being mere 'yes men'. They said, "Sir, if we deposit all the weapons in the headquarters, how will we handle the situation if violence breaks out somewhere?" The Commissioner replied in typical Parsi style, "I will control Ahmedabad with my cane!"

Of course, he could not control the 1969 riots with a cane! That is why just across the police station on Relief Road, a big Muslim business establishment called Edward Washing Company was burnt down. The police could not open fire to control the mob because they had no weapons. In 1992 also, Chimanbhai instigated communal violence. I was staying in a Juhapura Society where we witnessed a bank being robbed. But the police could not stop it because they were not given orders to fire. At that time, that was the only bank in Juhapura. Because of that incident, no other bank opened a branch in Juhapura for 15

years. It is only in the last few years that two-three new banks have come up Muslim dominated in Juhapura.

Even today, the leadership of the Congress is in the hands of dons. For instance, the chairman of the Minorities Cell of Congress in Gujarat for the last 15 years is a man named Wazir Khan Pathan from Vishnagar, Mehsana district. He writes B.A LL.B for namesake and is a member of the High Court Bar Association, but originally he made his money from bootlegging.

When Narendra Modi appointed me as the chairman of the Waqf Board, his first sentence to me after my taking charge was: "Go, serve your samaj." I really liked that. The best thing is that he never interferes in administration, be it that of Waqf Board or the government. And yet he keeps an eye on everything so that people do not misuse their office. He has never asked me to do this or that. He just gave the mandate to make Waqf Board an instrument of serving the community and gave me total freedom to steer the institution.

The Waqf Board was earlier totally defunct. The real challenge before me is that local Waqf trusts are all headed by *bhai log* and 99 per cent of them are Congressmen. They are not spending money they collect on community's welfare. I have not seen local trusts of the Waqf Board run a single dispensary or school. I am drawing up a plan of action for improving their functioning. Today, 70 per cent of Muslims are happy with Modi because he does not discriminate between people on the basis of religion or caste. He supports whoever is trying to do good work.

He makes all his officers work hard, go out into the field and reach the services to people. Everyone is happy with the stability he has brought to Gujarat. He has also not interfered with the trial of the riot accused. So many have been sent to jail, many have been sentenced to life terms. Muslims now feel secure as never before.

In the 2013 municipal elections, when I was projected as the prospective mayor of Ahmedabad, I secured 40,000 votes from Juhapura on the BJP ticket. That is, in itself, incredible because BJP never before put up a candidate here in this Muslim constituency. Congress had destroyed Gujarat politics through *bhai log* and mullahs who misled the poor and uneducated among their own community. Modi altogether changed the face of Muslim politics in Gujarat.

Acceptance of Muslims within Gujarat BJP

Asifa's story of such easy acceptance within the BJP had initially come as a surprise to me but not after I visited Bharuch and talked to leading lights of BJP, including those who left the Congress to join Modi. When

I first heard her account in February 2013, it seemed logical to ask Asifa, whether she felt resented by BJP elders on account of being a woman or a Muslim, whether they were jealous of her quick rise to prominence. She said:

> No. There are two types of discrimination. The first kind is when they try to push you down because you are a woman. In most of the male-dominated societies, you might feel at some or the other point in life that you are being kept down. I didn't get that feeling. On the contrary, senior leaders were happy to guide me and help me whenever I needed backup support with facts or whatever. I was never discriminated against on account of being a Muslim or on account of being a female. I wasn't discriminated against even as a new comer, nor did I ever get the sense that they were jealous of me for being projected in a high profile manner. In fact, all these things turned in my favour from day one. Narendrabhai recognised my potential and reposed trust in me from the very first time we met.

When I asked her if, like Zafar Sareshwala, she faced any hostility from the Muslim community for having joined the BJP, this is what she had to say:

> Zafarbhai began engaging with Modi ji in 2002 when there was blind prejudice against Modi ji. Muslims did not really know him then. Now he is time tested. Therefore, the Muslim community's response to my joining BJP has been marvelous! They were very happy. You should check out the enthusiastic response of Gujarati Muslims to my public meetings through the TV footage of those days available on YouTube.[2]

Changing Role of Muslims in Gujarat's Electoral Politics

In the national media we only hear of how Muslims are shunned by the BJP and vice versa. The fact that no Muslim candidate was fielded in the assembly election of 2012 has been touted as proof of Modi's aversion for Muslims. It was alleged that Modi had vowed publicly that if a single Muslim ever enters the assembly, he will have the entire complex washed with Ganga *jal*. I asked several Muslims if there was any truth in this. Almost all said, it was "utter nonsense". This is what Zafar Sareshwala had to say:

2 A video of Asifa Khan addressing Gujarati Muslims in a public meeting is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fi8Bkh3KvE&feature=youtu.be.

> Absolute *bakwas!* It just shows how vicious the lies being spread against Modi are and how desperate the Congress is to hold on to the Muslim vote bank. Modi's hands were tied because of the Congress ganging up with VHP, RSS, and Bajrang Dal. Winnability of a candidate was a major factor in this election. Why is it that those who criticise him for not giving a single ticket to Muslims for the 2012 assembly election did not say a word of appreciation when an unprecedented number of Muslims won on BJP tickets in the panchayat, municipal, and zila parishad elections? If Muslims were seriously upset on this count would they have ensured victory of BJP's Hindu candidates against Congress Party's Muslim candidates in those areas where they have a substantial vote percentage or majority?

The results of the recent Salaya Municipal Corporation in Jamnagar district show that BJP has won 27 out of 27 seats. Out of these 24 are Muslims who won on BJP tickets. When I asked Zafar whether this is freak case or a firm trend of Muslims winning on BJP tickets, this is what he replied:

> In the 2012 elections, 31 per cent Muslims voted for BJP. In Asifa Khan's Bharuch areas, more than 35 per cent Muslims have voted for BJP and this pro-BJP voting has taken place even where the Congress candidate was a Muslim. Congress has lost even where the Muslim vote share ranged from 38 per cent to 62 per cent. In such decisive constituencies, a BJP Hindu has won. Why? I have said this publicly that the media was mistaken about the reasons for high poll percentage in the 2012 elections. The 75 per cent voter turnout happened in Gujarat because the Muslim community came out in large numbers to save Modi.
>
> Before the 2012 assembly election, numerous Muslims had won on BJP tickets in zila parishad, municipal, and panchayat elections. The Salaya village you mention is on the western coast. At one time, this area was famous for smuggling and was one of the most neglected areas as far as economic and infrastructure development is concerned. It had no electricity, no roads. Modi brought in an ambitious coastal development plan. In that area, there are a lot of Muslim villages. You can see for yourself that the development activity in the region included Muslim villages.
>
> In the previous municipal elections, when five Muslim candidates won on the BJP ticket in this area, it made a big impact on the entire community. They felt that if BJP is bringing in so much economic development and also

giving them an opportunity to acquire political office, then why should they stay out. This is why Salaya Muslims ensured victory of BJP in all the 27 seats.

The media has never celebrated the unprecedented victory of hundreds of Muslims in panchayat, zila parishad, and *nagarpalika* elections on BJP tickets. But they rave and rant endlessly about Muslims not being fielded in assembly elections. Why are they so desperate for bad news from Gujarat? If they don't get bad news from the ground, they just cook it up! On February 13, 2013, the day the results of Salaya Municipal Corporation of Jamnagar district were announced, NDTV's Barkha Dutt had invited me to appear on her programme, 'The Buck Stops Here.' It was meant to discuss the victory of hundreds of Muslims in municipal elections on BJP tickets, especially Salaya where, with a 95 per cent Muslim population, all 27 seats were won by the BJP. Normally I appear on OB from Ahmedabad. But since that day I was in Delhi, I offered to go to the NDTV studio for the show. But, at the last minute, Barkha Dutt cancelled that show. Is it because the media, especially channels like NDTV are determined never to let any good news about Gujarat come to national attention?

The election results of zila parishads and Municipal Corporation counters the propaganda that only urban Muslims have benefited from Modi's development agenda. These results clearly indicate that the rural Muslims in erstwhile neglected areas have benefited far more and therefore are turning towards BJP in a big way. In the panchayat elections, BJP has won more than 60 per cent of total seats. Out of 76 *nagar palikas*, the BJP won in 45. In 20 per cent of the panchayats BJP and Congress are 50-50. Voters are not influenced by marketing gimmicks. Muslims are voting for a party they have traditionally avoided only because they see the ground reality change dramatically in their favour.

Those who allege that only wealthy or elite Muslims are tilting towards Modi should be reminded that only a small super elite group among Hindus in select metros is demonising Modi. This is all media manipulation. Modi has built a very strong team of thinking and respected Muslims in Gujarat. However, in my view, a certain number of Muslim candidates winning elections is far less important than the economic development of Muslim community. When some Muslims or Scheduled Castes (SCs) win elections and hold political office, it does not necessarily lead to betterment in the life status of the entire community, especially since too many of our elected representatives of all communities start behaving like super maharajas without any sense of social

responsibility that many of the erstwhile maharajas held towards their *praja*. When a certain number of Muslims or SCs win elections, political power rests in the hands of select few but inclusive economic development raises the status of the entire community, which can then negotiate with these power holders from a position of relative strength. This is exactly what is happening in Gujarat.

To call Modi a popular chief minister is an understatement, Modi's constituency loves him, the Congress may like it or not. They think that he is bigger hero than Salman Khan *(ye Salman Khan ka baap hai).* I know some very big Islamic scholars who said, "Vote for Modi. We need Modi. May Allah save us if he loses! Who knows who will come if Modi loses!" (*Modi ko vote do, Modi chahiye, Allah khair kare,Ye haara kaun aayega pata nahin).*

When 31 per cent of Gujarat Muslims voted for Modi in the 2012 elections, they were accused of voting for BJP under fear. In 2002, Gujarat Muslims were actually terrorised and yet they voted against Modi because our elections are free and fair and there is provision for secret ballot. Do they mean Muslims got terrorised in 2012 and therefore voted for Modi? Muslims voted for Modi because they have tasted economic progress under Modi's rule.

It is also a bogus charge that only wealthy Muslims have moved towards Modi. For the wealthy it makes very little difference whether the BJP is in power or the Congress. The big industrialists actually prefer a corrupt government because they can manipulate it in their favour. An honest government benefits the ordinary citizen and poorer segments of society the most. Even if there is a 200-day curfew in Ahmedabad, people like me are not worried about the ration in my house or my children going hungry. But the poor Muslim who sets up a hawker cart on the roadside or the one who drives a rickshaw or taxi, his life is adversely impacted even if there is a two-day curfew. There will be no ration in his kitchen. It is this segment of Muslims that has gravitated towards Modi in larger numbers because the fruits of good governance and a riot-free Gujarat have benefited them most. The BJP does not take Muslims for granted. At every level BJP leaders are actively engaging with Muslims. You feel important when a candidate comes to you and taps you on your shoulder and says, "Boss, I have come to request you for your vote." This gives the community a much greater sense of dignity than merely having two-three token candidates being given tickets at election time.

I would trust an honest Hindu more than a dishonest Muslim. We don't want rubber stamp Muslims of the type the Congress has cultivated in the party

to blindly do its bidding. We prefer a person who does justice, even though he may not be a Muslim. For the last 50 years, they have been making fools of us by handpicking a few rubber stamps. We don't want them anymore. Why do you want to have a Ministry of Minority Affairs? You won't give me my basic rights as a citizen, but you promise me what is not my rightful due. You promise me reservations, which you cannot give me as per the Constitution. But when I say, please build a small primary school in my area, something you can easily do, you Congressmen don't do it!

The truth is that Modi has excellent personal relations with a number of Muslims. He has built a very strong team of Muslims who work closely with him. They are well educated and command the respect of the community. They are not seen as *bikau* (saleable) types; they are not the kind who curry personal favours and become courtiers. By contrast, the Congress Party is today devoid of a credible team of Muslim leaders, not just in Gujarat but also in the rest of India.

Tell me, do you see any serious Muslim faces in Rahul Gandhi's team? Can any one of Congress Muslims help it come to power in UP or Bihar? I am convinced that the 2012 state elections, in which Muslims have openly voted for Modi, will be a game changer for all of India. If the BJP projects Modi as their prime ministerial candidate, I think Modi will have no difficulty in convincing the rest of India, including Muslims, that he is their best choice.

The anti-incumbency factor affected some BJP MLAs who were poor performers. There was no anti-incumbency against Modi. Since Congress joined hands with RSS/BJP defectors Keshubhai and Waghela, Modi was put in a tough situation. If he had not given tickets to these sitting MLAs, they would have moved over to Keshubhai's party and dented BJP's vote. The Congress thus managed to tie down Modi. Otherwise, he would have dropped the poor performers among his MLAs and ministers.

The predicament of the Muslims was indeed pathetic till Modi changed the scenario. The Congress used to take them for granted and did nothing for them. On the other hand, the BJP thought that Muslims were not going to vote for them, so why do anything for them? But Modi has adopted a pro-active approach towards Muslims.

In pre-Modi days, the BJP did not have a single Muslim face in Gujarat. Today, it has some of the most respected Muslims who stand up as BJP spokespersons. It is the Congress, which has lost out on Muslim support and doesn't have a single credible face to defend the party. They only have

NGOs in Mumbai and Delhi to act as Congress mouthpieces. The Gujarat Muslims can easily convince Muslims of other states about Modi's credentials because they have experienced the change and shared the fruits of peace with economic development.

CHAPTER 18

Of Peace & Prosperity

Are Muslims Part of Gujarat's Growth Story?

Equal opportunities are given only by an honest government…Most Muslims are happy that Modi never uses divisive strategy of dangling this or that carrot for a particular community, for Hindus or Muslims, but always addresses himself to 6 crore Gujaratis…The wealthy know how to thrive under any and every regime…The MNCs and corporates don't care whether a country is democratic or a dictatorship. But the real beneficiaries of peace and versatile governance are the poor for whom new doors of opportunity are opened....Modi does not play the politics of scarcities, which pitches one community against another. He creates conditions of plenty so that everyone gets their due without quarrelling with others.

Zafar Sareshwala, Ahmedabad based Entrepreneur

One of the oft-repeated charges against Modi's government is that Muslims are being economically crushed in Gujarat due to hostile political atmosphere and discriminatory government policies. Even a touristic visit to Gujarat shows that the reality is completely at variance with this propaganda. Hotelier and steel merchant Inamul Iraqi's rags-to-riches story is symbolic of the rapid upward mobility among Gujarati Muslims in post-2002 Gujarat.[1] Iraqi started his life as a scrap picker from garbage while his father was a poor mill worker. To quote him:

> My father was a labourer in Jupiter Mill and we stayed in a small dwelling that came with a rent of Rs. five per month. I have studied only up to class ten. I began my current business about 12 years ago. But I started working at age 15

1 I met numerous such Muslims in both the rural and urban areas of Gujarat. In my forthcoming book, I will deal with this issue from the point of view of Muslim farmers, fishing communities, and other marginalised groups. But for the moment, I will let urban Muslims describe the processes that helped them prosper.

collecting scrap from streets. I used to go around on a cycle to collect small pieces of iron scrap from roadside garbage, sort them out in my tiny shop, and sell it to foundries. Later I switched over to a hand lorry and expanded my business over time. In 1992, I managed to get an agency for selling pig iron. In 2003-2004, I started my own foundry, followed by a second one in Rajkot in the year 2006. In 2009, I purchased some hotels.

We are Sunni Muslims and our forefathers came from Iraq. But our family has been in India for seven generations. We really consider it our good fortune that our elders did not opt for Pakistan and we stayed on in India. My father and his three brothers were also freedom fighters. Originally my family was settled in UP. He later moved to Gujarat to explore business opportunities. He used to work in a mill but managed to open a small shop for me to start a business. Starting from that little iron scrap shop, I've built this business empire in the last few years.

In 2002, Muslims were adversely affected. However, that the very same Muslims, who had only Rs. 2 in their pockets at the time of the 2002 riots, possess at least Rs. 5 today. That is their incomes have grown dramatically. Gujarati Muslims are competent and intelligent. They know how to make use of given opportunities. The community has prospered as never before.

Gujarati Muslims have always been business oriented. We are also open-minded and tend to think big. Despite the 2002 riots, madrasa representatives from all over India came to collect donations from Gujarat for the needy Muslims in other states. But the country's politics is dominated by UP and Bihar Muslims. They have no other work but politics. While Gujarati Muslims are engaged in real work and generating wealth, we have not converted politics into a business. Unfortunately, Gujarat Muslims do not count for much in national politics.

The day I met Inamul Iraqi he told me he was going to Kutch to supply a material worth Rs 45 crore to a steel plant. In last two months alone, he had done business worth 45 crores with them. According to Iraqi:

Muslims are prospering in Gujarat because Modi has tightened the law and order machinery in such a firm and impartial manner that trouble-makers don't dare raise their head. In 2002, Modi didn't even know what was happening. But now he has full control over the law and order situation. His small and compact cabinet also consists of people who think similarly and work like a family. So the Party and government are not at loggerheads with each other.

A section of Muslims are unhappy with him because this CM doesn't let them get away with creating disturbances. For instance, over the issue of insult to the Prophet in the US, political mischief-makers were all set to create a riot but Modi handled them very firmly. Such devious elements among the Muslims are unhappy with him but the Muslim community as a whole is very pleased with him because he has also put down the trouble-makers within the Hindu community. If someone from the Hindu community starts a ruckus, there is bound to be reaction from the Muslim community as well. Sparks will fly from both sides and the fires will start raging. That is why CM sahib has always tried to put down such elements with a firm hand. The rabid elements within Hindu community outfits are therefore not happy with this CM.

He wants to ensure that there is no repeat of 2002. If he was the divisive kind, all he had to do is to loosen the screws of both these groups and we would be back to the days of repeated riots. He has a great ability to enforce law and order in an impartial way. Muslims have understood that their prosperity is linked to a riot-free Gujarat which only this CM has ensured. Since the anti-social elements among Muslims have been curbed with determination, it has taken away the fear that Hindus had of Muslims and removed prejudices. That has also helped business relations between the two communities.

Moreover, the Gujarat government has made it much easier for people to do business and prosper by simplifying rules and regulations, making government policy less convoluted and more transparent. You don't need political god-fathers to do good business in Gujarat. Those who want to do honest business can prosper, no matter which community they belong to.

Riot Free, Education Oriented Growth

Similarly, Rajubhai, the Muslim taxi owner who drove me to Kutch says, in 2001, he had just one old taxi. Today he owns a fleet of five taxis. He could expand his business so fast because tourism, which was non-existent till ten years ago, has grown manifold. A large proportion of people who are running tour and travel services in Gujarat are Muslim. He says:

I've been driving a taxi since the last 34 years.. In the year 2000, if someone hired my taxi for sightseeing in Ahmedabad, we just had a couple of poorly maintained places to show. It all got over in a couple of hours. But the manner in which Modi ji has created new infra-structure and developed historic sites, both Hindu and Islamic, makes not just Ahmedabad but all

of Gujarat, including its desert regions a tourist delight. There is so much to see in Ahmedabad itself that tourists come in droves and stay long. Take the example of Kankaria Lake. It had become a stinking and shrinking pool of water surrounded by filth till Modi ji's government revived it into a world class tourist attraction. Families can now spend a whole day in that complex.

Under the Congress regime there were riots every year. Neither Hindus nor Muslims could celebrate any of their festivals in peace. Every community felt anxious and worried at the approach of their festivals because you could never predict when a riot would break out. People would try to stock as much food and other essential commodities as they could, out of fear that a riot might break out any time. It wasn't just a matter of fear-riots invariably broke out on all occasions. Both Hindus and Muslims lived in that state of fear and anxiety.

There were riots on Hindu festivals as well as on Muslim festivals. If there was Moharram there was *danga (riot)*, if there was Rath yatra, there was a *danga*. Be it Eid or Diwali, riots invariably accompanied such festivals. All of us lived under fear psychosis and everyone tried to keep their homes well stocked in advance because with each such episode of rioting- curfews would last for days and sometimes go on for weeks. They drained away the savings of poor Muslims and depressed their incomes. After 2002, Modi government has brought such *sukoon* (peace) that we are actually breathing freely. Even if a small incident happens in one mohalla, the next mohalla doesn't even get to know of it because such troublemakers are dealt with firmly. The Modi government is extremely strict in this matter. As a result, everyone lives in peace, everyone sleeps in peace.

The best thing I like about Modi sahib is that he has given tremendous fillip to education in Gujarat. Today, girls from the Muslim community are not only attending schools but are taking up higher education in large numbers. This has brought a new kind of upward mobility for Muslims. Earlier they would put their children to work by age 14 or 15. Now Muslim children are also going in for higher education. There has been a marked improvement in quality of education in government schools in every village and *kasba*. Today Gujarat is emerging as the No. 1 state in the field of education. My sons studied in local schools and did well. One is an engineer in DELL Company. The other son is preparing for the Indian Police Service. The third one has just passed his class 12 exam.

Because Muslim enterprises are prospering as never before, a large percentage of the working class has moved up in social ladder and become middle class. The honest truth is that those who did not have Rs. 20,000 in 2008 are today

purchasing houses priced at Rs. 20-30 lakhs. Tell me what more evidence you want of progress? Even the poorer Muslims are purchasing houses worth Rs. five lakh in one installment.

Muslims Dominate Restaurants & Hotel Business

Such stories of rapid upward mobility among Muslims can be witnessed in every city and town as well as villages of Gujarat. One visible sign of it is the extremely high proportion of Muslim-owned restaurants and hotels on every highway, town, and city of Gujarat. These are mostly owned by very hard-working and closely-knit community of Chiliya Muslims, most of who come from the area around Modi's own town, Vadnagar and Palanpur. Their dialect of Gujarati is called Palanpuri.

Chiliya Muslims were traditionally into farming and sent out their sons to work as taxi drivers or waiters in restaurants of Mumbai and other cities of western India. In the last ten years, many of them have returned to their home state and opened up a distinct chain of restaurants on every single highway and city of Gujarat and now spreading also to neighbouring states of Rajasthan and Maharashtra. These are modern swanky eateries, with air-conditioned dining halls-and not the kind of lowly roadside *dhabas* you find in UP or Bihar.

Apart from their internal cohesiveness and ability to raise loans within the community, what has helped Chiliya Muslims is the rationalisation and transparency of government regulations in opening up of new enterprises. Starting a huge restaurant on the highway requires not only easing of regulations in acquiring land, but also simpler procedures for land-use change. In most other states, this requires a combination of political patronage and huge bribes. But several Chiliya Muslims restaurant owners I talked to said that land-use change and restaurant licenses now come easily within a couple of months through the due process.

Since all Chiliya Muslim restaurants serve only vegetarian food, many of my leftist friends had led me to believe that this was on account of pressure from Hindu zealots. Since all of them have 'Hindu sounding' names, the leftists interpret it as a camouflage to avoid detection and fear of attacks from Hindu rioters. In fact, when I first saw over 90 percent Hindu clientele in a Muslim owned vegetarian restaurant named "Trupti" (meaning 'satisfaction') in Godhra, I thought this was an exception. Therefore, I expressed my delight about it on Twitter. At

once, I got several counters from outraged "secularists" saying I was insensitive to the fact that Muslims had been compelled to sell only vegetarian food and seek shelter behind 'Hindu' names, indicating that they were still living under terror.

However, after talking to dozens of Chiliya Muslim restaurant and hotel owners during subsequent visits, I found that this paranoid description was far from reality. This is the reason offered by Chiliyas for restricting themselves to vegetarian food:

- An overwhelming number of Gujaratis are strict vegetarians. They would not even step into a restaurant serving meat or chicken. But they have no hesitation about eating in a vegetarian restaurant owned by a Muslim. Therefore, a non-veg restaurant makes far less economic sense, especially since meat-eaters have no problem in eating vegetarian food. In fact, Indian snacks are almost all vegetarian.
- Many Chiliya Muslims themselves are vegetarian because they are deeply embedded into Gujarati culture. Even if they eat meat, it is once in a while, and is not a regular part of their daily diet.
- Restaurants that serve mutton and chicken attract a lot of liquor-consuming customers, especially truck drivers who like to spice up their drinks with tandoori tikkas or butter chicken. Since most of these restaurants are on the highway, there is more chance of drunkards getting unruly after a few drinks.
- Some owners also said that policemen fond of drinks and non-veg food also descend on such restaurants expecting free meals.

As for the charge that they allegedly gave 'Hindu' names like 'Swagat' (Welcome), 'Siddhi'(Perfection), 'Jyoti' (Light), 'Panthi' (Traveller)', 'Sarvoday' (upliftment of all) to their establishments, the restaurant owners I talked to looked puzzled at my question. To sum up the answers I got: "These are Gujarati words and Gujarati is our mother tongue. That is what we speak at home; that is the language we study in schools and colleges. We neither read nor speak Urdu, nor have any emotional or intellectual connect with it. Why do you consider Gujarati a Hindu language? It is the language of all Gujaratis!"

Incidentally, all these words have their roots in Sanskrit and are therefore common to almost all Indian languages, including Gujarati. Since sections of BJP and RSS emphasise the need to promote Sanskrit and have introduced it in their schools, for most leftists teaching of Sanskrit is synonymous with "reactionary Hindutva." The left "secularist" agenda

of forcing minorities to assert 'differentness', even where it does not exist- and of pushing them to abandon all the linguistic, cultural, social, and historic bonds that unite religious minorities with the Hindu majority- is acting as a divisive force and corroding millennia old *samrasta* and *bhaichara* (brotherhood) bonds between Hindus and Muslims.

Key Indicators of Muslims Prosperity

Zafar Sareshwala, who I have quoted extensively in earlier chapters, deserves to be heard again. He is first and foremost a businessman and part of a versatile entrepreneurial community. Therefore, he has a keen eye for the economic status of the Muslim community in Gujarat. He challenges the assiduously built stereotype of Gujarati Muslims being an economically deprived community with concrete facts and figures:

> Muslims have never been as economically well off as they are today. Here are some revealing indicators. Zakat is the easiest yardstick to judge a Muslim's wealth profile because you pay zakat as a certain percentage of your income. The money collected as zakat is essentially used for helping meet the basic needs of poor families. Suppose this year I paid Rs. 2,500 zakat, you can immediately extrapolate that I am worth Rs 100,000. Next year if I pay Rs 5,000 zakat, it means my wealth has increased from one lakh to two lakhs. Zakat has been continuously increasing in Gujarat year after year. In fact, you will find that 50 percent of the zakat of madrasas across the country comes from Gujarat and the balance 50 percent from the rest of India. If Modi had destroyed Muslims, their share of zakat should have fallen. But in the last ten years, the wealth of Muslims has increased.
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> I will give you other important indicator, that of BMW sales figures: We sell BMW cars. The cheapest BMW is for Rs. 30 lakhs; the highest goes up to Rs. 1.5 crores. When we started the BMW dealership, we never thought that we could sell more than two to five of these cars to Muslims. Last year, in 2011, we sold 11 percent of our BMWs to Muslims. The population of Muslims in Gujarat is 9 percent. This year again, we maintained that sales figure; we sold about 59 BMWs to Muslims. How on earth did this wealth come to them? You go to any Muslim dominated area in Ahmedabad or Bharuch, there is massive construction activity going on there. Those who say Muslims are marginalised or ghettoised, need to understand that to build a house even in a ghettoised area, you need money. Land prices have risen tremendously in Muslim areas. In a good housing society, you cannot find land for less than Rs. 50,000 per

square yard; it is higher than in any Hindu area. In Paldi, where we live, there's no bungalow for less than Rs. 5 crores. Muslims are buying these bungalows, where has all this money come from?

It is alleged that only wealthy Muslims are pro-Modi. Think of it this way: 250 people earn their living from my business, out of which 230 are Muslims. Similarly people say that Modi has given great benefits to Tatas. But 10,000 people are directly employed by Tatas, apart from indirect employment created due to the Tata plant. Do you think Tata employs only Hindus? Through the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, Modi brings in fresh investments into Gujarat. I think more than half of Gujarat's households benefit from these new investments.

Equal opportunities are given only by an honest government. Modi has a simple policy with regard to business and industries and everything revolves around that policy. Whether you are black, white, Hindu, Muslim, whatever, there are only two important criteria taken into account by the government: the equation between the amount you invest and the number of jobs you generate. His putting in place of a clear-cut single window clearance policy for investments and enterprises has helped small entrepreneurs far more than the big corporates. The latter manage to twist decisions in their favour with ease through bribery and political influence with corrupt regimes. But the small businessman suffers when corruption dominates policies and decision-making. That is why in most parts of India, the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are in crisis and collapsing. In Gujarat they are growing and flourishing. Ambani's Reliance Industries flourished even during full-blown license-quota raj, as did the Tatas because they operate on a gigantic scale and can survive bureaucratic crackdowns. But rule of law and a transparent policy which gives a level playing field to all, benefits the small and micro enterprises most of all.

It is well known that most Muslim businessmen are concentrated in small, medium, and micro enterprises. While their share in the overall population is nine percent, their share in SMEs is proportionately far larger at about 22 percent. Today, Muslims in Gujarat don't face any hassles or discrimination in getting government clearances when they want to set up enterprises in Gujarat. Otherwise Muslims could not have prospered as they have.

I know any number of Muslim entrepreneurs who were worth Rs. 50 crore in 2002 but today they are worth Rs. 500 crore. Muslims are prospering at a rate faster than the Hindus because most of the trades and occupations they are engaged in are thriving due to political stability and encouragement of small entrepreneurs and agriculture. Muslims are undergoing far more rapid upward mobility than their Hindu counterparts.

> Modi has a simple formula. All are equal before law. Take your rights as citizens. Don't ask for this or that concession because you are Hindu or Muslim, or on the basis of your caste or community.

This reminded me of the time Mehbooba Mufti, the President of People's Democratic Party in Kashmir, made a statement in the National Security Council that Muslims even from other states were finding Gujarat very investment friendly. She narrated the example of a Hyderabadi or Malyali Muslim having come back very elated after exploring setting up his new business in Gujarat. But like Maulana Madni, she hastily disowned the statement when she found it splashed in newspapers because she was at once taken to task by the Congress and other "secular" parties. To continue with Zafar's account:

> The growth rate of small and medium enterprises in Gujarat has been over 75 percent in the last decade. I will explain to you the reason for this. Small and medium enterprises develop around big industry. For example, when Tata brought in his Nano car plant, it created space for a lot of ancillary industries for supplying parts to Tatas. A car company is basically an assembly unit. They get brake pads from one source, the wipers from another. They need hundreds of such components.
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> The Gujarat manufacturing model of growth is better than the IT model of growth of Bangalore. In the IT model, if there are ten lakh employees, each earning 30-40 lakhs per year-that salary goes straight to the bank. It does not percolate much to the lower levels; their lifestyle benefits a limited number of people. In the manufacturing sector every job creates ten additional earners. It percolates down to the lowest level. When Modi brought in corporate investment, it led to the growth of ancillary industries and to support the ancillary growth, came small and medium enterprises. Gujarat was always industry friendly. Modi did not start the process; he only improved the systems to make it bloom.
>
> In most Indian cities, industrial growth pockets have very slummy conditions. Even in Delhi, the Okhla or Wazirpur Industrial Areas create eyesores, plus wretched slums for the working class. Today Gujarat's industrial growth is not producing slum-like conditions. The Gujarat Industrial Development Centre (GIDC) calls them "Industrial Clusters". The new ones developed during Modi's regime-such as the automobile park-are world class. Please go and see them. My own family belongs to the small

and medium enterprise sector. We are into manufacturing valves just as numerous other Sunni Bohras are. We are a classic example of a small-scale industry feeding in to large industry. There is no power shortage, no water problem in Gujarat's industrial areas. Roads are world class and the overall infrastructure is growth friendly. Even sanitation is very good in these pockets. Modi is not addressing this or that narrow or large constituency. He is doing what India requires today.

Most Muslims are happy that Modi never uses divisive strategy of dangling this or that carrot for a particular community, for Hindus or Muslims but always addresses six crore Gujaratis. There is no need to talk of Muslims separately. Tell me, when the American President talks, does he address the Blacks, the Whites, Hispanics, Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, or Koreans separately? If he did that, it would take him hours just keeping a count of diverse groups. He talks of all Americans. In my view, it is good that Modi talks of and works for all Gujaratis. Muslims are quite capable of taking their legitimate share from the opportunities created for all.

At the Gujarat Summit 2013, you yourself heard Modi talk at length about giving encouragement to SMEs. The SME sector Modi was talking about is largely a Muslim domain. You will find that every single Sunni Bohra owns an SME and Modi is working very hard to create more SMEs. He has focused on developing ITI (Indian Technical Institutes). Tell me which other chief minister is paying so much attention to ITIs as does Modi? They all want an IIM (Indian Institute of Management) or IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) or an engineering college for the children of the elite. Modi goes beyond that and works for ITIs. Who are the ones getting training in ITIs? It is mostly the children of poor Muslims, from artisanal castes and classes. That is why we tell Modi, please don't do anything special in the name of Muslims, instead do it for all. We will make sure we are included in "all" and get our share. Likewise, I tell my community, you have to first get into the bus if you want to reach your destination. If you don't enter a bus how do you expect to reach your destination?

I say it bluntly to all Muslims, if you develop your talents and deliver honestly, even the Ashok Singhals of this world will have to give you your due. I give this example: If Ashok Singhal sahib had a helicopter for which he has to choose from two available pilots: The first one is a Kashmiri named Mohammad Khan who has 500 hours of flying experience and the second one is a Ganga Ram a Brahmin from UP who has a mere 50 hours. You tell me in all honesty, who will Ashok Singhal select for flying his helicopter?

When I took this BMW dealership during the surcharged atmosphere of Gujarat, I was very apprehensive about our business prospects. We thought that it is mainly upper caste Hindus who are likely to be buyers of such high-priced cars. All of us three brothers are conservative bearded Muslims whose identity is writ large on our faces. We wondered if Hindus would come to us for buying cars. I say hats off to the Hindus of Gujarat, because so many of them say, 'We are going to buy from Mullaji's showroom only.' Meaning, we have established our own unique brand as car dealers.

There was a time when if a Hindu in Mumbai needed a taxi for his wife or daughter during late hours, he would prefer a Chiliya Muslim driver because they were trusted for being upright and honest. I tell Muslims, become like them and people will discriminate in your favour.

The benefit of Modi's good governance and the development model is going most of all to the poor. In fact, a large majority of poor is now part of the middle class because they were given opportunities for quality education. For example, there is all this fuss about Modi not utilising scholarship grants sent by the Centre for the Muslim community. The Central government is needlessly grilling Narendra Modi in the Supreme Court for his refusal to create a special quota for Muslims in scholarships by the government. But what Modi has done is far better. Let's look at the figures. The Central government's contribution to the much-touted scholarship fund for Muslims is Rs. 3.75 crores, while the state's contribution is supposed to be Rs 1.25 crores. This is to be distributed among 55,000 Muslim students; it comes to just over Rs. 900 per head per year. Is this a great bonanza to be tom-tommed about? By contrast, the Gujarat government has its own scholarship scheme for the economically weaker sections under which 63,000 Muslim students have benefitted every year to the tune of about Rs. 2,600 each. Most Muslim families and schools refuse to go for the Central government scheme because it involves endless paper work and bureaucratic procedures for a paltry sum of Rs. 900 per year. By contrast, Gujarat government's three times larger scholarship comes hassle-free because the processes have been simplified to make it easily accessible.

Sachar Committee's Certification to Gujarat

Even the Sachar Committee appointed by UPA government in 2005 to assess the status of Muslims in different states of India clearly shows that Gujarati Muslims are educationally and economically far better off

than Muslims in most other parts of India.[2] Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy rate of Muslims was found to be much lower than the all-India figure as well as in all Congress or Left-ruled states. For instance, when the Central Government's Labour Ministry's latest figures disclose that unemployment rate in Gujarat is a mere one percent, it indicates that there is negligible unemployment among Muslims. Infact, lakhs of Muslims from UP, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala etc. are employed in Gujarat. A state starts attracting huge quantities of migrant manpower, only when it is growing fast and needs more workers and professionals than are available within the state.

The all-India literacy rate for Muslims was 59.1 percent while in Gujarat it was 73.5 per cent. 76 per cent of urban Muslims were literate in 2006 as compared to national average of 70 percent. In the rural areas, literacy among Gujarati Muslims stood at 69 per cent as against the all-India average of 59 per cent. Since then it has increased substantially because of very high investments made in improving school education and ensuring 100 per cent enrollment of children. There are hardly any villages today that do not have a school within easy reach. Government schools in Gujarat are functional because they have been provided with all the necessary amenities such as airy, well-furnished class rooms, proper teaching materials, computers and IT enabled teaching, effective controls on teacher absenteeism, systematic attempts to improve the caliber of teachers and more. The system is being subjected to constant improvements.

As per the Central government appointed Tendulkar Committee report which conducted a state-wise comparison of poverty rates in 2011-2012 among Muslims in rural India, the corresponding figure of poor Muslims all over the country was 26.9 per cent . The report ranked Gujarat at the lowest with 7.7 per cent poor Muslims . The proportion of poor Muslims in Maharashtra was 28.6 per cent, Bihar and UP 34 per cent, Assam 40.2 per cent, West Bengal 23.9 per cent, and Orissa 28.4 per cent.

2 The Sachar Committee was meant more as a political gimmick than a serious exercise in understanding the social and economic status of Muslims in India. It has followed questionable research methodology. However, even as per this report, Gujarat's Muslims are far ahead of Muslims of states ruled by the Congress, the Left or socialist parties. For a critique of the Sachar Committee Report , see D.L Sheth "Minority politics: the shifting terms of policy discourse", *Seminar*, October 2009 . *Web.* http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/602/602_d_l_sheth.htm.

As far as government jobs are concerned, with a Muslim population of 9.1 per cent, Gujarati Muslims held 7.9 per cent of higher-level government jobs in Gujarat. By contrast in the Left citadel of Kerala, 24.7 per cent Muslims held 7.3 per cent high-status government jobs; 10.6 per cent of Maharashtra Muslims held just 1.9 per cent; Delhi's 11.7 per cent held mere 4 per cent; Karnataka's 12.2 per cent Muslims held 2.1 per cent; Assam's 30.9 Muslims percent held a mere two percent of high level government positions. All these are Congress ruled states.

The average per capita income of rural Muslims in Gujarat at Rs. 668 was higher than that of rural Hindus at Rs. 644. The figures for Bihar were Rs. 426, Bengal Rs. 501, UP Rs. 509, and Andhra Rs. 610. Similarly, per capita income among urban Muslims of Gujarat at Rs. 875 was higher than in the other states of India. It was Rs. 748 in Bengal and Rs 551. in Bihar. The Sachar Committee data also shows that the financial help made available to Muslims through various government welfare schemes is far higher in Gujarat than in most other states as also their representation in industry, trading, manufacturing, and service sectors.

As far as poverty among urban Muslims is concerned, Gujarat's rate is 5th lowest in the country with 14.6 per cent Muslims covered in the category of the poor. By contrast, Delhi has 33.5 per cent, Maharashtra 15.6 per cent, UP 36.4 per cent, West Bengal 35.5 per cent, Karnataka 24.5 per cent. Bihar's graph stands tallest at 51.1 per cent. The all-India average is 22.7 per cent.

Making Quotas & Reservations Redundant

Since a large percent of Muslims are from artisanal communities engaged in handicrafts and micro-industries , they have benefitted most from the massive investments made by the government in skill development programmes. To continue with Zafar's narrative :

> The Gujarat government had set up a Vocational Guidance Bureau for 30 years without producing any results. But Modi has invested heavily into skill development and higher education. In 2001, there were just 11 universities in Gujarat; Today Gujarat has 44 universities. This happened within ten years. In 2002, there were 2,500-3,000 seats for engineering, now there are 55,000. Muslims, including those from humble families, have been quick to take to newer courses in higher education, even though earlier Muslim families were reluctant to spend on higher education. This is because most of them are directly linked to new professions.

I recently met a young Muslim who is doing a Ph.D. from IIM, though he is from a poor family. He said on camera, "Modi sahib has made education accessible even for poor Gujaratis. There was a time when Ahmedabad people had to go to other states to study. Now there are ten engineering colleges in Ahmedabad itself. That is why I got admission in my home city very easily." His family could not have afforded to send him to a private engineering college in some other state.

The fee in government engineering colleges in Gujarat is around Rs. 15,000 per year whereas it is Rs. 50,000-55,000 in Rajasthan's government run colleges – that makes it nearly four times higher. Colleges in Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka etc are even more exorbitant. Every community has benefited from this massive expansion in educational opportunities.

Those who had to pay lakhs of rupees to study in other states can now stay at home and pursue higher studies. In our society, whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim, most parents are reluctant to send their daughters to live in hostels. They say that if you can get admission within the city then it is fine, but we don't want to send you to far away states. Now many Muslim girls have begun studying medicine and engineering because they can get admission in local colleges. Today even the children of lower middle class Muslims can afford to send their sons and daughters to study engineering, medicine, or IT.

Since the Gujarat government has put an end to the policy of maintaining scarcity of seats in professional colleges, there is no need for reservations and quotas. There are so many surplus seats in our professional colleges that many go unclaimed. In 2012, there were 55,000 seats for engineering. At the end of admissions there were 5,000 seats to spare after all the seats were filled up by the residents of Gujarat. Muslims are getting far better educational opportunities in Gujarat today than in other states, without need for quotas. Modi does not play the politics of scarcity, which pitches one community against another. He creates conditions of plenty so that everyone gets their due without quarrelling with others.

Similarly, the poor Muslim who sits on the footpath as a street vendor or who drives an auto rickshaw has benefitted most from riot-free Gujarat with rule of law firmly in place.

Having been involved for the last 20 years with the battle for legalising the status of street vendors, it was satisfying to find safe hawking zones in several towns and cities in Gujarat. Asifa introduced me to a large group of Muslim street vendors of Ahmedabad who had gone in a delegation to

Narendra Modi when the area around an ancient temple in which they operate was to undergo major beautification and redevelopment. Modi not only promised that they would not be removed but also made sure that the development plan of the area includes dignified and improved legal spaces for street vendors. He told them that Gujarat would be creating best possible arrangements for hawkers. I hope to follow up on the actual outcome of this promise in the coming months.

To continue with Zafar's account:

> Those who are wealthy, don't even go to vote, it is the poor man who votes. The 31 per cent Muslim population that has voted for Modi belongs overwhelmingly to the poorer sections. The wealthier Muslims are still embarrassed about voting for the BJP. Recently, I decided to go and see for myself what was happening in Saurashtra. My family and I traveled by road through the villages all the way up to Gir, taking stops at Rajkot and Jamnagar. I was quite surprised that there is a pro-Modi wave even in Junagarh, in the heart of Visavadar, which is the constituency of Keshubhai Patel. A political leader becomes a hero for ordinary citizens only because he has done something good for people, made their lives better, not because he is glamorous or a macho man. The roads in the area are beautiful including those that reach interior villages. Right up to Junagarh, there are six lane roads. My wife was asking me, "*Kache makaan nahi hain yahan par?*" Are there no mud houses in these villages?) We could not believe the transformation of a small town like Junagarh in such a short period. It has now become quite prosperous. You don't see the usual rundown homes that exist in small towns of India. We found rows and rows of new well-built houses with modern civic amenities. We did not see piles of garbage that are typical of most Indian towns and cities.
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> The Sakkarbagh Zoo set up by the erstwhile Nawab of Junagarh in 1963, was at one time very famous. But then it fell on bad days. In the last ten years, this zoo has also been restored to its full glory. Last year they celebrated its 150th anniversary. My kids did not want to go to the zoo, because they had seen the zoo in Mumbai and London but did not find either of them worth the visit. When they went and saw the Junagarh Zoo, my daughter told me, "Daddy, unbelievable, we would have missed something so exceptional and regretted it all our lives had we not come with you." You have to see it to believe it. They have created a wonderful eco-system for the lions, the tigers, hippopotamus, ostriches and other animals. The place is now both clean and aesthetic. The animals are healthy because they get proper professional care. There was no

stink and filth that you normally find in Indian zoos. It was a reflection on the kind of people who have been selected to manage the place. Even the zoo guide was very well qualified; a trained zoologist, very professional, very efficient.

When the man at the top is efficient, good administration percolates down to the very bottom. I always believe in the dictum, *jaisa raja vaisi praja*. *Jaisa chief minister ya prime minister, uska reflection hota hai neeche* (the quality of citizens depends on the quality of rulers).

I asked the man whom we had hired as a driver for our Gir visit, as to why they are pro-Modi since that area used to be a stronghold of Keshubhai Patel. He replied, 'If Modi had not emerged, we would have remained crushed.' See in that area, Patels are the dominant community. Most others are from the much poorer Durbar community.

Modi has made a difference to the lives of those who did not have land or old business networks. It is not as if Modi gave them doles. For example, this driver from the Durbar community said, "Earlier I used to drive a jeep and earn Rs. 5,000 a month. But ever since Modi launched his "*Khushboo Gujarat Ki"* campaign with Amitabh Bachchan to promote tourism in the state, there has been a phenomenal increase in tourist inflow even in our area. Me and several others who used to migrate for jobs outside the village have now set up our own tourist resorts in the village. Today, I don't have to go out to earn a small salary in other people's employment ; I run a successful resort on my own farm."[3]

The Gir forest has been there for centuries. But who knew about it? Since Modi built world-class infrastructure right up to the interiors, restored old monuments, and launched an innovative tourism campaign, Gujarat has suddenly emerged as a prime tourist destination. Today 50 percent of tourist inflow of India is coming to Gujarat, which had a negligible presence on the tourist map ten years ago. This has brought unprecedented prosperity for both Hindus and Muslims.

The wealthy know how to thrive under any and every regime. The multi-national corporations know how to go and do business even in the jungles of Africa but the poor man, the petty entrepreneur can rise in life only under a regime that provides pro-people governance and does not discriminate between different groups of citizens. The MNCs and corporate don't care whether a country is democratic or a dictatorship. But the real beneficiary of peace and versatile governance are the poor for whom new doors of opportunity are opened.

3 I followed up this story and visited this and other villages in Gir forest and hope to share what I saw and heard in another book.

CHAPTER 19

Hindu Hriday Samrat or New Mehmood Gaznavi of India?

The Myth Versus the Reality of Hindu-Muslim Relations in Gujarat

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The media prefers talking to those who have made commerce out of other people's problems. I call such people merchants of misery – Our country would be far more peaceful, and inter-community relations would return to being amicable, if their shops would shut down.

I remember the words of Maulana Azad who pleaded with the Muslims who opted for Pakistan, not to give up their watan, their homeland. He had said that after Hazrat Ali, the fourth Khalifa of Islam, no one has succeeded in uniting Muslims on the basis of Islam. Culture and language are far greater binding factors than religion….
Zafar Sareshwala

While Modi's popularity among the people of Gujarat, including Muslims, is palpable, it is an open secret that Modi faces a great deal of opposition within the Sangh Parivar. Ahmedabad-based businessman, Zafar Sareshwala shares some insights into why the *Hindu Hriday Samrat* (the monarch of Hindu hearts) evokes so much anger among members of outfits like Bajrang Dal, prominent leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and certain sections within the BJP and RSS:

> Modi has brought about a sea change in the attitude of party leaders and grass root workers of BJP by setting his own example. But there are disgruntled elements in BJP, who are not happy with this. They are the ones who complain of Modi being a dictator. But most of all it is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dalis, and sections of the RSS who are up in arms against Modi. Some

months ago, I was in a TV debate and found the whole RSS brigade raving and ranting against Modi. Then suddenly when Modi won, they said this is the victory of our ideology. I said on TV, no, it is not your victory. It is not your ideology that won. This is Modi's victory. You were hell bent on getting him defeated! I told them to their faces, you people were there to destroy him, you were working against him.

Let me give you an example of RSS elements being at loggerheads with Modi. I stay in Paldi, which is where well off and high profile Muslims have bought houses. We are very small in number, maybe five per cent of the total voters in that area. It has been a traditional BJP bastion and has been anti-Congress for years. Haren Pandya was a famous MLA of Paldi. This time, the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP) of Keshubhai Patel (former BJP chief minister and RSS man) had fielded Haren Pandya's wife, Jagruti Pandya, as its candidate against the BJP candidate. GPP's pamphlet asked: "How come in Modi's raj Muslim population is increasing in Paldi, which is a Hindu area? How come in Modi's raj there are shops selling beef and eggs in Paldi? How come there is cow slaughter in Modi's raj?"

Muslims are not fools, they vote very decisively because they felt that letting the Congress win is as good as bringing in a Togadia regime. Riots alone were not the only troublesome period for Muslims. I am talking of the Gujarat of 1990s when there was no Modi, there was no BJP. At that time, Togadia was the one who ruled Gujarat. Forget about Muslims, no Hindu at that time could open a non-vegetarian restaurant in Gujarat.

Muslims were so terrorised that with my beard I could not dare to venture into an elite 100 per cent Hindu area like Bopal. We felt afraid of going and watching a movie in one of the drive-in theatres in Hindu areas even during periods that had no riots. There was terror in the atmosphere during Congress regime because of the dominance of VHP and Bajrang Dal.

At that time, Modi was nowhere on the scene. I remember in Haren Pandya's election meetings, he used to start with two statements. First he would say, *"Agar yahan musalman hai to chale jaanye, wo meri baat nahi sun payenge."* (If there are Muslims in this meeting, they should leave. They will not be able to stomach what I am going to say.) He would start with this and end with, "When I come to power, I will drive away all the Muslims from here to Juhapura."

One of the best things Modi did was to marginalise and defang the VHP and Bajrang Dal because they were the main troublemakers. Modi never attacks them verbally. But he is making sure they do not get away with riots and mayhem on any issue. For example, when any government wants to undertake

development work, such as widening roads or providing drainage, one of the biggest hurdles are illegal encroachments on public land. A large part of such encroachments are undertaken by vested interests that build mandirs or set up *mazars* on public land. This is the easiest way to occupy public land for free because governments are afraid to touch religious structures. Gujarat also had hundreds of such mandirs. Most governments are afraid of taking action because such elements are able to mobilise religious sentiment and create a crisis for the administration. In 2006-2007, when the Modi government started major infrastructure projects, including widening of roads, they were faced with decades-old illegal encroachments in many cities including Ahmedabad, Baroda, and Surat. Some people had built multi-storied structures on public land. So many governments came and went but none dared touch these people. But Modi gave full power to municipal officers to remove all unauthorised encroachments be they mandirs, dargahs, or private buildings. So they went ahead and bulldozed 280 such illegal temples. At that time five dargahs in Baroda also came in for clearance operation. To save those dargahs, even I was taken to Modi by my own community members. Modi asked a simple question, "if you say this land is in your legal possession for 100 years, please produce documentary evidence." They could not do so. Therefore, by common consent, Muslims removed that dargah on their own.

During those days, prominent *netas* of the VHP called Modi the new Mehmood Gaznavi who has come to destroy Hindu temples. Ashok Singhal, Pravin Togadia, etc. abused Modi all over the place. But he did not respond to their provocative abuses. He simply went about his business letting it be known loud and clear, through his firm actions, that the government would not tolerate disruption of law and order. Their ranting and protests did not evoke any popular response. Modi faced a tough situation in disciplining the administration in the first two years. After that he had a fine grip on it all and could deliver what he promised or set out to do.

Similarly, when Advani sahib went to Pakistan and announced at Jinnah's *mazar* that Jinnah was a "secular" leader, there was uproar all over India, as also in Gujarat. When Advani was scheduled to visit Gandhinagar, his parliamentary constituency, the VHP/Bajrang Dal had planned big demonstrations against him. Even though Modi was not in agreement with Advani's certification of Jinnah as a "secular" statesman, and these protests suited him politically, he made sure that VHP lumpens did not succeed in their disruptive lawless demonstrations. For him, it was a matter of ensuring law and order. When it comes to rule of law, he does not spare his own party people.

> It goes to Modi's credit that, even though after 2002, a series of provocative incidents happened in Gujarat-for example, in the Akshardham terrorist attack 36 Hindus were killed, but there was no Hindu retaliation. He took a very tough stand. After that, in 2006 and 2008, a series of bomb blasts occurred in eight to ten cities of Gujarat including Ahmedabad, Surat, and Baroda. Many people lost their lives but Modi did not let the situation boil over. Mischief mongers were kept under tight control. There were seven-eight bomb blasts in Ahmedabad itself. That could have led to a big backlash but again he took a very firm stand.

Rajat Sharma, who at one time was a BJP insider, but now claims to have distanced himself, said the same:

> Though Modi is projected as the poster boy of Hindutva, the truth is that the VHP/RSS hate Modi because they feel that this man does not allow police to help them or court cases be influenced in their favour. He does not allow them to rule the show, does not allow any more riots–they can't attack Muslims anymore and yet he has become *Hindu Hriday Samrat*, while they are being treated as riffraff. A section of the RSS hates him because he doesn't kowtow to them nor let them interfere in governance.

Zafar's perceptive observation about the defanging of mischief mongers has been endorsed by Muslims in diverse regions of Gujarat during the course of interviews with me:

> It is noteworthy that Praveen Togadia of Vishwa Hindu Parishad makes all his foul speeches in Hyderabad, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, or U.P. All these states are ruled by the Congress Party and its proclaimed secular allies. Why doesn't he have the courage to come and make those speeches in Gujarat? From 2002 till date, no one has had the guts to give this kind of hate speech in Gujarat. He knows that if he says anything like that here, within 24 hours he will be seen grinding a *chakki* in Sabarmati jail.
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> Togadia spews venom without any consequences in Congress-ruled states and has not yet been arrested even once. It has been months since his hate speeches in Maharashtra but the Congress government is saying that they are still looking into what he said. Is this not a sign of willful encouragement?
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> Some months ago, one of the Urdu newspapers *Nai Duniya* had the following headlines: "*Togadia mei himmat ho to jo Hyderabad mein kaha hai*

wo Ahmedabad mein keh ke dikhaaye, Modi uski taange tod dega." (If Togadia has any guts, he should go to Ahmedabad and say what he said in Hyderabad, Modi will break his legs).

It's not like Togadia sahib did this for the first time. In Gujarat, Togadia, Haren Pandya, and Zadaphia routinely made hate speeches during earlier regimes. These three were famous for pouring venom. Modi has never made any such speeches. His opponents try to prove his anti-Muslim bias by flimsy charges such as his sarcastic way of addressing former Pakistani President responsible for the Kargil war as 'Miyan Musharraf.' But "*Miyan*" is not a term of abuse, and referring to a Pakistani general who was responsible for Kargil war with a touch of sarcasm is no big crime.

As far as Gujarati Muslims are concerned, the tide had started turning in favour of Modi after 2007. But not many prominent Muslims dared to come out openly for fear of being attacked by the secular brigade as well as rabid Muslim leaders. Among the first ones to step out of line, and in Modi's favour, was Maulana Vastanvi, a well-respected Islamic scholar and educationist.

It is well known that Maulana Vastanvi's Madrasa, with 400 students inside, was saved only due to Modi's timely intervention. As soon as he got a call about an impending attack on this madrasa, Modi sent forces and ensured that no harm came to any of the students. Moreover, Vastanvi is himself from Gujarat. So he knows the Gujarat story first hand. He was the first person from Gujarat to be appointed the vice chancellor of Deoband University in 130 years. It was a historic event. During his conversation with *The Times of India* correspondent after taking charge of Deoband in 2011, Gujarat also came up for discussion. Vastanvi was asked to comment on the progress being made in Gujarat. He merely said that Gujarat was progressing well and the Muslims were equal partners in the state's growth and advancement. The correspondent then asked him whether people should forget the 2002 riots. Vatsanvi replied that nine years have passed since the riots. It is time to forget those and move on. These were the only two statements that he made. Tell me, are they factually wrong? And yet a huge furore was created by media as well as the establishment of Deoband. They could not tolerate the fact that the vice chancellor of Deoband dare say a mild word in praise of Modi's development work.

But, Vastanvi refused to submit his resignation and said they would have to dismiss him. So a meeting of the *Shura* (Governing Council) was called. There were 13 persons on the *Shura* – six voted against Vastanvi, one person remained neutral and five voted for him. Vastanvi did not take part in the voting. The persons who voted in favour of Vastanvi were the top ulema of India. The fact

that five eminent Muslim scholars voted in favour of Vastanvi's statement was overlooked by the media which only broadcast anti-Vastanvi hysteria.

He is is basically an educationist. He runs a chain of madrasas and every madrasa of his has a regular school and technical institute attached to it. He teaches computers in his madrasa as well as English and mathematics. Plus he runs a science college, an engineering college, and a pharmacy college. He is now setting up a medical college in Aurangabad. The institutions set up directly by him provide education to over 2 lakh students. Finally, they forced him to retract his statement about Modi and compelled him to quit Deoband. Vastanvi's quitting is Deoband's loss more than his. He had to buckle under pressure from the Congress Party because all his educational institutions are outside Gujarat or mostly in Congress-ruled states.

But due to the collective efforts of BJP with Modi in the lead, there has been a serious change of heart among the Muslims. The inclusive growth model, a secure atmosphere for Muslims, total absence of terror that they earlier lived under, the government upholding the rule of law, series of convictions of politicians responsible for riots, and a lot of other pro-active measures have made Muslims gravitate towards the BJP.

It seems to me that only three kinds of people are left opposing Modi:

1) The distantly placed armchair critics-who are outside Gujarat-sitting in say, England, America, Delhi etc. All they do is to send press releases and post comments on social networking sites. But our media gives enormous importance to them. For example, the Council of Indian Muslims in England has condemned its own patron, Lord Adam Patel, for meeting Modi. They also condemned the British government because the British ambassador also came to meet Modi.

   Most of these people outside the country have no live connection with India, and judge on the basis of what they read in the media. They don't visit India as regularly as does Lord Patel. Justice demands that you judge things on merit, not through partisan propaganda. India gave even a Pakistani terrorist like Ajmal Kasab, who was caught on camera massacring people during Mumbai attacks, full opportunity to defend himself in court in deference to the constitutional right given to every accused. But they will never give credit to India for this.

   They don't come and check out for themselves but are busy condemning Modi because that has become a politically fashionable thing to do. But they will never condescend to ask me why I am engaging with Modi? I was their hero when I was opposing Modi. Why don't they extend me

the courtesy of asking why I felt compelled to change my mind? I have become a pariah with several fatwas issued against me..

2) The second variety of Modi opponents are Muslim intellectuals and self-styled leaders living in other states of India. I can't understand how people claim to be "intellectuals" but do not display the integrity to at least visit Ahmedabad, if not all of Gujarat, before making statements against Modi's relations with Muslims. They advise us Gujarati Muslims from T.V. studios in Delhi and Mumbai as to how we should conduct our affairs in Gujarat. Muslim intellectuals like Shahbuddin sermonise through newspapers by merely posting a 'letter to Modi' in the media! By contrast, Lord Patel went and met Modi to discuss matters concerning the Muslim community. If you are really concerned about 75 lakh Muslims of Gujarat, then go meet Modi. You write one letter in a newspaper, come on T.V debates, and expect all your sins to be forgiven? *(Ek khat likh diya,T.V ke debate mein aa gaye aur sab gunah maaf?)*
3) As far as the third group of anti-Modi NGO's like that of Teesta Setlavad and Shabnam Hashmi are concerned, I have no complaint against them because they have opened shops and made a lucrative business out of it.

But now the tide is turning. The Gujarat Vibrant Summit of 2013 saw world leaders from 121 countries participate and sing songs in praise of Modi. The British government has started engaging actively. The European Union leaders are struggling to find ways of cosying up to him. Modi did not go wooing any one. They are coming to him in droves. You must have seen recent reports of the current German ambassador meeting Modi. He was all praise for the Gujarat model of development. But some years ago, a German delegation of MPs belonging to the Christian Democratic Party supposedly visited Gujarat. We never got the slightest whiff of that visit-they never met any of us who are working for the Muslim community. But this delegation went and held a press conference in Delhi saying that Muslims and other minorities are facing terrible persecution in Gujarat. We challenged them saying, "Who are you to speak on our behalf? Even if there is a problem, it is our internal matter. In fact, you owe us an explanation; tell us who you met when you came to Gujarat? Tell us, which Muslim groups you met when in Gujarat? Where all did you go? If you were in Ahmedabad, why were we community leaders excluded?"

We wrote a formal protest to them saying all this but never got a response. Therefore, we did our own investigation and found out that they did not meet any Muslims. There is some Christian group headed by Father Cedric Prakash,

which had invited this delegation to Ahmedabad. There have been no attacks on Christians during Modi's regime. But they used the shoulders of the Muslim community to fire guns at Modi. This group was upset about a bill on religious conversions because it would restrict the operation of Christian missionaries involved in conversions. Modi government has never put any restrictions on Christian schools or other institutions.

I wrote a letter to the then German ambassador asking him whether what the delegation said in the press conference is the stated position of the German government. If so, who has given them the right to speak on our behalf? Don't tell us how India should handle its internal affairs. If we have any problems, we are capable of sitting together and resolving them. The Ambassador never replied to my letter. But we organised a press conference and spoke openly against the conduct of the German delegation. Now the Germans have woken up to the reality of Gujarat and are trying to woo Modi.[1]

At one time, Lord Patel had sent a congratulatory letter to the German parliamentary members saying they did a good job in favour of Muslims by attacking Modi's government. It was his Council of Muslims, which had helped me in 2002 to file a case against Modi in the International Court of Justice. In 2002, he was leading the battle against Modi from the front. He had earlier condemned me for starting the process of engagement with Modi.

But see how he has had to change. During his annual Gujarat visit in 2013, he sought an appointment with Modi and congratulated him on his achievements. He also extended an invitation to Modi to come to London as his guest. Modi sahib treated him with great warmth and deference, completely overlooking all the earlier attacks on him leveled by Lord Patel and his Council of Muslims.

This meeting is very significant-Patel is a very wise and respected man and no one can say the man is "sold out", He does not live in India, nor does he have any remaining relatives in Gujarat. But he has a deep emotional connection with Hindustan. He is from Bharuch district of Gujarat and visits his ancestral village every year. Normally, a man of such high stature does not change his public posture because it is a blow to one's ego. But his yearly Gujarat visits over the last ten years must have convinced him that there is good reason to revise his opinion. So he decided to meet Modi.

1 The US Government has also had to climb down from its high horse and end its official boycott of Narendra Modi's government with US ambassador Nancy Powell personally visiting Gandhinagar for a meeting with Narendra Modi on February 13, 2013 after his reported refusal to a dinner invitation by Powell.

I asked Zafar whether there was trace of bitterness in Modi's attitude towards Lord Patel?

> When you see photographs of that meeting, you will see for yourself how relaxed and pleasant the atmosphere was. In fact, Patel openly said that even if Muslims have some differences with Modi, they should sit down with him to resolve them. He was the first Muslim to openly criticise Wharton University of the US for cancelling Modi's lecture through video conferencing.

To quote from Lord Patel's letter:

> Wharton's refusal to Narendra Modi weakens free speech and the quest for justice in 2002 riot cases… In order to listen to someone, one does not need to be an ardent follower or a bitter critic… Freedom of expression knows no boundary. The more we listen to people and ideas, the more enriched we get. When an educational institution gets prescriptive on the kind of speech one can and cannot listen to on the campus, it kills intellectual freedom, a democratic idea that the U.S.A., India, and the U.K. have cherished from times immemorial…Cancelling lectures will not help, in fact it will present Modi-baiters in [a] poor light that they have extinguished all points of reason and debate to have had to resort to such an action…As a Gujarati myself, I consider it to be a gross insult that the chief minister of my state, however wrong one may feel he is, cannot express his views at a global forum, such as the one in Wharton, because a few in the audience don't like him…. The biggest need of the hour is to ensure justice for those who lost their lives in the unfortunate violence in 2002…Convictions in 2002 riot cases were moving faster than any other post-riot convictions anywhere in India…But if people feel shunning Modi is the best way to achieve their ends, they are mistaken. In fact, by opposing Modi's visit to Wharton, they are only strengthening the hands of the enemies of justice, while at the same time, they are doing a great disservice to the process by which justice and closure may be achieved in Gujarat…

Zafar says, "This marks a major shift in Muslim opinion. Salim Khan once said to me, 'Is Modi's victory in Gujarat elections not the wish of Allah? If Allah wants Modi to be the prime minister then the efforts of those obstructing his path will not succeed.'" But Zafar admits that the battle remains an uphill task because:

> Anti-Modi sentiment continues to be orchestrated by the media as the definitive truth, irrespective of of what the people of Gujarat or courts say. Positive developments about Gujarat are never covered by the media. All that I am telling you, I have narrated the same things to numerous journalists, including those of the prime time T.V channels, like Rajdeep Sardesai and Sagarika Ghosh. But no one pays heed. You know how it is with TV channels; they trap you in their own questions. They only want to project those who abuse Modi.
>
> In 2007, in the heat of the very bitter elections-those were the "*maut ka saudagar*" days-NDTV called us for a special show against the backdrop of the Reliance refinery. When I went there, I was zapped. They had divided the participants into two distinct groups–one was supposed to be pro-Modi and the other anti-Modi. The cameras were going to roll in few minutes and there I was put in the pro-Modi group.

This way of reducing every issue into a caricature of school debating societies–one team 'for' and the other 'against' has played an important role in dumbing down political debate in India. It inevitably polarises every issue and prevents realistic appraisal. Why did Zafar not insist that NDTV change the seating arrangement, I asked? He describes his predicament of that day:

> I was made to sit with pro-Modi group along with BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dalis. On the 'anti' side were Congressis and NGO's working for the Congress. I was very uneasy sitting with Bajrangis. But I told myself I am only here to create a neutralising effect, I am not here about who wins or loses the election. My whole idea is to build bridges between the communities. But even so I called Mahesh Bhatt to ask him what I should do. He said, "Don't worry; hold on to your honesty. You are neither anti- nor pro-Modi, whatever you have in your mind and heart, just tell them that with full honesty. That will have far greater impact than being 'pro' or 'anti.'"
>
> I did exactly that. But my wife walked away and went over to the other side. She said that she could not bear to be seen as pro-Modi. I said OK, we are a very democratic couple. You have freedom of speech which is a fundamental tenet of Islam. But I must confess, throughout that program I was squirming inside because most of the people with me were almost like fringe elements and goons of VHP and Bajrang Dal. I wondered whether NDTV picked up such people deliberately to show Modi in a bad light because VHP types are

not pro-Modi. I took a firm stand against those people right then and there. For example, a doctor, who was also the president of Jamnagar VHP, said something to the effect that if Muslims don't like Gujarat, they can go away to Pakistan. I did not allow him to continue and said, "This is not the way your chief minister talks. What are you trying to project?" I challenged him and he had to apologise for his statement in front of the camera.

I could not tell the NDTV anchor not to create in this pro-versus anti-Modi divide because when we reached the venue, the people were already sitting as per that scheme. I then decided that I will not let them trap me in this way. I will set my own rules. Anchors and television networks normally want you to say what suits their line of thinking. I decided that I will say what I want to say, it doesn't make a difference to me where I sit.

They never listen to people like me or Asifa Khan the way they listen to Teesta Setalvad even though unlike her, we have no personal agenda. The media prefers talking to those who have made commerce out of other people's problems. I call such people merchants of misery. Our country would be far more peaceful, and inter-community relations would return to being amicable, if their shops would shut down.

I recently spoke to Rajdeep Sardesai about an article he had written and said that your problem is the moment you want to show Muslims, you get stuck with three types. The foremost category is the religious bigots like the Imam Bukharis of India. There are some bigots who do not keep the typical Islamic beards but are Bukharis at heart. The second type you pick up are rabble-rousers whose private and public lives are altogether different. For instance, when Asaduddin Owaisi is in Delhi he roams around in shorts, eats in Italian restaurants, but when he returns to Hyderabad he wears the typical Islamic topi and kurta pyjamas. The third category you project are the Javed Akhtars, and Shabnam Hashmis of the world who have a problem calling themselves Muslims and yet rave and rant about the oppression of Muslims.

But real practicing Muslims like me are ignored. They don't treat us as representatives of Muslims. Just as in Hindi films the hero catches the villain by the collar and eliminates him from the story line, so also Bukharis and Owaisis of the world need to be cast aside. If they were treated firmly by the law and order machinery, their macho posturing will vanish in thin air, and even their constituency will not come to save them. Even those who may today come to meet them in jail will stop in no time. The rest will simply forget they ever existed. But you don't do it because of political compulsions.

These secularists think they have a special Ganga whereby whoever takes a dip into the Congress Party becomes secular. But Gujarati Muslims are now much wiser. They have seen the benefits of good governance, a riot-free state, and all-round economic development in which they are now equal partners. Therefore, they have become Modi's most avid supporters no matter what the media says.

Please explain this contradiction to me. The growth story of the Indian economy started under Narasimha Rao when Manmohan Singh was his finance minister. Today if I say that these two were the architects of India's economic reforms, I am not called Congress lackey. However, the moment I say that the Gujarat growth story started under Narendra Modi, I get tarred as Narendra Modi's sycophant.

Changing Face of Hindu-Muslim Relations in Gujarat

My leftist friends have repeatedly charged that Gujarati Hindus have enforced economic boycott against Muslims in order to push the Muslims into penury and drive them out of the state. I asked Zafar whether after the 2002 riots, or even previous ones, Muslims faced economic boycott and other forms of active discrimination by the Hindus? This is what he said:

Social interaction between Hindus and Muslims had altogether collapsed in many parts of Gujarat during the riot-torn decades of 1970's, 1980's, and the 1990's – right upto 2002. They retained business relations. Hindu families did purchases from Muslim shops and vice versa. But they had negligible social interaction.

During days of riots, a Muslim woman would never dare walk through a Hindu neighbourhood. As soon as the riots would be over even burka clad women go to Hindu neighbourhoods. We have an area in the old city called Dhalgarwad; you may not have seen this kind of atmosphere anywhere in the country where 600 cloth shops are owned 100 per cent by Muslims and their clients are 95 per cent Gujarati Hindu women. Even if there is hatred, it lasts for some days. The moment a riot is over; those Hindu ladies go only to Muslim shops to buy cloth. And it is not like it's a monopoly. Next to Dhalgarwad is Ratan Pole and it has 100 per cent Hindu owned cloth shops. But all Hindu women who go to Dhalgarwad–you should ask them why.

Similarly, today you will find any number of Hindus going to 100 per cent Muslim areas for *kababs* and other Muslim food specialties. Earlier, no Hindu stepped into Juhapura. It was seen as a mini-Pakistan. Now you will find many

Hindus in the heart of Muslim localities like Kalupur and Dariapur–eating *tawa tikkas* and *barahandi*. Likewise, in the Hindu majority area of Manek Chowk, in the heart of Ahmedabad, where a vegetarian food bazaar begins only after regular shops have shut down at 8 p.m., you will find any number of Muslim families, including *burka* clad women, enjoying their dinner or snacks even as late as 2 a.m.

Now with better law and order, people feel emboldened enough to visit each other's homes. Earlier even if Muslim families invited Hindu business associates for marriage or other family functions, they held a separate Hindu function for them with strict Gujarati vegetarian food–never a joint event involving both Hindu and Muslim families. But now some of us have taken the initiative to have joint functions so that Hindu and Muslim families can interact. Believe me, Hindus are responding with great warmth.

An economic boycott has never really happened in Gujarat despite the best attempts of VHP and Bajrang Dal. During every riot, they come up with their pamphlets asking people to boycott Muslim shops. But it has never happened-not even after 2002 when the hatred was at its worst. Otherwise Muslims would not have survived. Although, the Togadias of the world try their damned best but they have never been successful, nowhere in Gujarat, even in the epicentre of riots.

It is not just Modi, but the entire Gujarati society has moved on, and is reconstructing a new equation with Muslims. After 2002, we took it upon ourselves to ensure that no Muslim child would be deprived of education simply because his or her family can not afford the fees or buy books. Many Hindus gave us money for it. For example, at the start when we sponsored a Muslim girl's education in a medical college, one of my Hindu friends said that he will pay for that semester's fee for the girl. That really boosted my morale and convinced me that humanitarian spirit is alive even in Gujarat.

Those who say that there is a lot of Hindu-Muslim hatred in Gujarat are perpetuating a myth. That hostility stayed alive for some time after the riots. Even after 2002, once things settled down and the ice was broken, it is Hindus who extended help to Muslims to rebuild their lives. How much can the Muslims do alone? My sister and sister-in law run a school for Muslim girls from poor families. There are 450 students in that school. They cannot even afford Rs. 200 per month as school fees. The challenge was that if we don't charge a proper fee how do we run a good school? How do we get good teachers? So we contacted all our convent-educated girls with good degrees and told them we don't want any money from them, but we wanted their time.

Some give certain number of hours a day; others come on certain number of days per week. They are doing it in the spirit of service, but they are not professionally trained as teachers.

Interestingly, there is a super-elite Hindu community school in Ahmedabad called C.N Vidyalaya, among the best anywhere. In the last 20 years not a single Muslim student has studied in that school. When this school's management came to know that we were working so hard to provide quality education to girls from poor Muslim families, they approached us on their own saying: "We will train all these women who are teaching in your school and bring them at par with trained teachers." Our teachers had regular under-graduate or post-graduate degrees but lacked teaching skills. Now C.N. Vidyalaya is upgrading all of our teachers by giving them free training for three hours every day. Our school is called Islamic school and all our teachers are *namazi, burkawali* women. The C.N. Vidyalaya management said, 'don't worry; we will also provide them an appropriate place for namaz.' They even made arrangements for the *vuzu* (the ritual washing of hands and feet before namaz*).* But my sister said, "Don't worry about that. We will do those rituals before we come. But the point is they were pro-active in offering us help."

Earlier Hindus and Muslims had business dealings and commercial interactions but no social interaction. Some of us decided to take the initiative to promote social interaction involving families of the two communities. And it is bearing great results. For example, my wife, who is a professional artist, conducts an art workshop for Muslim students every year. When she organised a workshop for Muslim children, which was covered by *The Times of India,* several Hindu women phoned her and said why don't you conduct such workshops in our Hindu neighbourhood as well. She said that if they gave her space she would gladly do it. A family in a hard-core elite Hindu neighbourhood called Manekbagh provided her space in their bungalow. She, a burka clad Muslim, conducted a 30-day workshop in that Hindu home for Hindu women.

Hundreds of Hindu families came for our daughter's wedding. As the state is experiencing genuine social peace and security, inter-community relations have become far more relaxed. I tell my fellow Muslims, we also must take the initiative to promote social interaction. Muslims cannot continue to live in an alienated, insulated manner. We have not made much effort to familiarise our Hindu brothers about our culture. For example, many Hindus are under the impression that 'Allah-O-Akbar' is a war cry of Muslims (slogan of attack). What kind of Muslims are we? We have to open up and since charity begins at home, I began with my own daughter's wedding. But today such social

interaction has begun to take place all over Gujarat because the ruling party is not acting as a divisive force. It is providing a sense of security by upholding the rule of law. People don't view each other with as much suspicion as they did when riots were engineered routinely.

Earlier, a Mulsim auto rickshaw driver would be frightened of going to an elite Hindu area, now he can do so freely. Muslim plumbers, carpenters, and mechanics are now working in Hindu neighbourhoods without fear and are no longer afraid even to stay overnight for work. New opportunities have been made available because of 'Aman O- Imaan'. Modi did not announce any 15-point minority programme like the Congress Party did. If you have good governance, everything else falls into place.

Modi's critics tell us, "You should not forget that Modi was an RSS pracharak." I tell them, if the RSS is willing to own up Modi's ideas and inclusive model of development, then we will gladly support the RSS. See, the big issue for Muslims has been *jaan maal ki hifazat* (safety of life and property). Today, the Muslims are assured of that-they are not living in fear any more. And the doors of upward mobility, through entrepreneurial activity, have also been opened, even for rural Muslims. The Patels have dominance, they don't care if Modi is there or Keshubhai or Madhav Singh Solanki is the chief minister. They are people with land and other resources, including NRI connections. It is the poorer Muslims who have benefitted most from Modi's governance.

Another myth propagated by Congress-allied Left "secularists" is that lakhs of Muslims have left Gujarat and migrated to other states because of the hostility of the Gujarat government as well as Gujarati Hindus. This is what Zafar had to say on this issue:

There has been zero decline in Muslim population of Gujarat. Therefore, to talk of genocide is irresponsible. Genocide is a term which one should never use so loosely. Soon after the riots, some people did leave Gujarat. But almost all of them returned sooner than later. Even the Muslim tailor named Ansari whose terrorised face was used as the icon of the 2002 riots, returned to Gujarat after spending some months in "secular" Left front ruled West Bengal, where Teesta Setalvad had sent him. Now he wants to be protected from his "secular" well-wishers and has filed complaints against them for encashing his name and picture.

Even at the time of riots when I was in England, I used to say to fellow Muslims who thought India is not for Muslims, that there is no country like

India and there is no place in the world like one's own country. In England, despite all its egalitarian pretensions, there is a glass ceiling for all of us Asians. As Indians, we are not allowed to rise beyond a point. But in India, we have the right to fight for our rights, for our due share. I myself had a residence permit for England. I returned it and came back to India. One of my brothers had a residence permit for Canada, and the second one had it for Dubai. They too surrendered them and came back to settle down in India. I am not one bit surprised that almost all of those who left Gujarat in the wake of riots also returned. But even more significant is the fact that Muslims from numerous other states are coming for jobs in Gujarat. There is a huge inflow of migratory labour in our state, a large percentage of them being Muslim. This is borne out by the new census data. For example, in the foundry industry, the basic tasks of melting and moulding are done by people from Agra and Bijnor, a large percentage of whom are Muslims. There are numerous new settlements, which are exclusively inhabited by Muslims of U.P., Bihar, and Orissa etc. There are a number of Bengali goldsmiths all over Gujarat.

Gujaratis are not known to be hostile to migrants from other states. They don't go for "son of the soil" politics like Maharashtrians and even Biharis do. They are not insecure on this account. Modi, in fact, says to people of other states and even other countries, "Come settle in Gujarat, invest here, bring your skills to my state."

I remember the words of Maulana Azad who pleaded with the Muslims who opted for Pakistan, not to give up their *watan,* their homeland. He had said that after Hazrat Ali, the fourth Khalifa of Islam, no one has succeeded in uniting Muslims on the basis of Islam. Culture and language are far greater binding factors than religion.

CHAPTER 20

Flimsy Opposition Over Non Issues

Why the Congress Lost Credibility & Support

I now invite to address you, "The Merchant of Death." The "merchant of death" to terrorism, the "merchant of death" to corruption, the "merchant of death" to nepotism, the "merchant of death" to official inefficiency, the "merchant of death" to bureaucratic negligence, the "merchant of death" to poverty and ignorance, the "merchant of death" to darkness and despair.
Cho Ramaswamy, Editor, *Thuglak*, introducing Narendra Modi to a gathering in Chennai, 2008

I am aware that this book may appear as "too one-sided" in favour of Narendra Modi. This is mainly because for 12 years people have only heard a highly jaundiced version. I see this as a necessary and much-needed antidote. It is not my aim to paint NaMo as perfection incarnate; I am sure he has his own quota of limitations and faults. But whatever little I have seen of him and his work, whatever I have gathered from his old friends, associates, colleagues, and bureaucrats, has convinced me that Modi has done his best to rise above partisan interests and petty politicking.

I vouch for the authenticity of all those I have quoted in the book. None of them are likely to disown their statements. Even so I will be the first one to apologise and make amends if readers were to point out any inadvertent errors, factual inaccuracy, or misinterpretation of facts that may have crept into this book. I started this journey as a sceptic, but as I travelled through towns and villages of Gujarat, I was filled with hope and optimism for India.

It is not as if I did not try to seek out Modi critics in Gujarat. While I avoided meeting the Congress-propped professional opponents of Modi in Gujarat, some of who were my old friends, I made special efforts to talk to local Congressmen and BJP dissidents wherever I went. In each case, I followed up on their complaints against Modi. In each case, I found their

criticism flimsy, because the facts on the ground told a different story. The strategy of the the Congress has been to strengthen anti-Modi forces within the BJP instead of putting their energy into repairing their own party. This is an important reason why the Congress is rudderless and facing imminent collapse. Most Congressmen I met are deeply unhappy with their party leaders and are not-so-secret admirers of Modi. Many of the respected Congressmen have already joined BJP; many more are on their way to doing so. I will bring interviews with some such leaders in my forthcoming books.

Congress's Penchant for Trivial Issues

The issues picked up by the Congressmen are not only trivial, but often based on complete distortion of facts. That is why they make no headway within the state. Here is an example of the kind of ammunition the Congress Party is in the habit of using against NaMo, not so much for the benefit of the people in Gujarat, but with an eye on the national and international media that invariably obliges by publishing whatever junk it is spoon-fed.

On August 6, 2013, the management team of Himalaya Mall in Ahmedabad issued the following circular to its customers:

> We would like to inform you that from 9th August to 11th August 2013, we are implementing a "Reimbursable Mall Entry" system. The mall entry ticket value will be Rs. 20 per person...as "Discount Value." The amount would be reimbursed from the bill amount of the customer…The above system will help us in controlling traffic, attracting genuine buyers, and ensuring business to all the tenants. Initially this system is on a trial basis. We sincerely look forward to your cooperation. [If] you have any query please feel free to contact at the mall office…

It is noteworthy that the notice does not single out any community for entry fee in this circular. Even on the notice board placed outside the mall there was no hint whatsoever that Muslim customers would be selectively picked for the entry fee. Moreover, it is common practice for malls that attract a huge footfall on popular festivals like Diwali, Navaratri, and other special occasions, to impose such measures for controlling crowds. Himalaya Mall is not the first one to have started this practice. Nor is this practice unique to Gujarat.

I happened to be in Gujarat around that time and saw how known Congressmen were behind catapulting this innocuous incident into a major national and international controversy by building a case that systematic discrimination was being practiced against Muslims in "Modi's Gujarat." This is how Parth Shastri, senior correspondent, *The Times of India* wrote a Congress-scripted report titled, "On Eid, Ahmedabad mall charges entry fee from Muslims" published in *TOI* on August 10, 2013:

> A trip in the celebratory spirit of Eid turned out to be an experience in discrimination for many Muslims in Narendra Modi's Gujarat. The Himalaya Mall, among the five biggest malls in Ahmedabad, on Friday announced a fee of Rs. 20 from visitors from the minority community, to be returned to them only if they bought anything from the mall, and retained if they didn't.
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> Many felt it was discrimination against a specific group on Eid when footfalls at the mall peaked. The security personnel were being selective. We saw people walking past without paying any fee. When we asked the security guards, they said that they have orders to follow and asked us to pay up....Deepa Bhatnagar, Manager (Operations) of Himalaya Mall, told *ToI* that it was a routine move to check visitors on a busy day. "We had employed the same mechanism in the past to keep troublemakers out. We are planning to charge entry fee during the coming festive season including Diwali. The fee is being returned if any purchase is made, so the entry is practically free," she said.
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> Mall officials said that, against a routine daily footfall of around 10,000, Friday saw a surge in the numbers to around 30,000. About the selective demand of entry fee, she said the administration had decided to exclude women and senior citizens only. "There was no attempt to exclude anybody or charge specific persons," she said. However, this correspondent observed a distinct pattern in which entry was allowed. Youth from specific age groups of the minority community were being scrutinised and asked to pay the fee while whereas women and many others were allowed to walk in without being charged. Mall officials said last year, during Eid, they saw two group clashes inside the mall and a glass wall was broken. On Friday, the number of security personnel was increased and a team of policemen was deployed inside as well as outside the mall as authorities did not want any "trouble."

The Himalaya Mall is neither owned by Modi nor anyone even remotely connected to him. It is well known that too many people walk in malls simply for window shopping and whiling away time, in air conditioned

comfort, especially during the blistering hot summer months. This report admits that the numbers that come to the Mall on festivals are unmanageable. It also acknowledges that on the previous Eid two groups of Muslims had clashed inside the Mall and damaged some property. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for the management to take special precautionary measures to prevent similar outbursts of violence within their premises. But *The Economic Times* added even more masala to the August 10 report by publishing a whole tract on August 12, giving it the mischievous title "Discrimination in Modi's Ahmedabad." After repeating the absurd charge levelled by Parth Shashtri in *TOI*, *The Economic Times* report ends with the following pious sounding but politically-mischievous paragraph:

> Many would think it unfair to the *sadbhavna* (goodwill) seeking chief minister of the state, Narendra Modi, to hold him responsible for the conduct of the mall management. But it is precisely his politics that breeds the sensibility that underlies the mall's decision to treat Muslims differently. That politics stems from the ideology of the Sangh Parivar headed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which believes in the primacy of Hindus in Hindustan and imputes second-class status to all non-Hindus, Muslims in particular. That there have been no communal riots in Gujarat since 2002 is touted by the Parivar as evidence of the Modi government's commitment to identity-blind governance. Evidently, a quiet marginalisation of Muslims has been afoot, to an extent where a shopping mall can openly discriminate against them.

Without offering the slightest evidence for "marginalisation of Muslims," this write-up instigates a sense of victimhood among Muslims. This kind of reporting has become a standard pattern. Even if newspapers in Gujarat have to report a case of elopement or domestic discord, it is at once attributed to Narendra Modi as though he is personally responsible for every pick pocket, every petty crime, and even road accidents.

When the Himalaya Mall team, as well as others, protested against this distorted reporting, columnist Prashant Panday went further to make it a case not just of this or that Mall but laying it squarely at the doorstep of Narendra Modi alleging that he had transformed Gujarat into a Hindu fascist state. Here are extracts from the incredibly inflammatory piece he wrote:

> The *TOI* reports today how a mall in Ahmedabad decided to charge Muslims (mostly the youth) Rs. 20 as "entry fee" to enter the mall on the auspicious day of Eid. The hidden subtext is the assumption that Muslim youths are troublemakers. The slightly milder alternative subtext is that Muslim youths are louts who spend time in air-conditioned malls without actually buying anything. Would this be allowed in any state but Gujarat?
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> Of course, this is a "private" mall and Modi cannot be brought into this discussion. But in reality, the role of the government in shaping public behavior is apparent from this episode. What happens is this. People have certain points of view–in the case of Gujarat, an extreme wariness of Muslims–which is why they vote a particular Party (BJP) to power. Then the Party responds to this constituency and acts in a manner as if it represents only that constituency. It forgets that once elected, it represents everyone, and it has to become non-partisan. Such political conduct then makes the people's regressive thoughts even more entrenched. Instead, a more liberal, a more "nationalistic" party would have tried to mould the views of its followers towards modernity. But no, the BJP doesn't do that in Gujarat. Here, the party feeds off the people and vice-versa. It is shocking, and I have noticed this personally, that anti-Muslim sentiments in Ahmedabad today are worse than they were twenty years back...
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> Gujarat may be rich, but it is very poor socially. Its people can hardly be called liberal…. Just look at Modi. He proudly proclaims he is a Hindu nationalist. Clearly, he is the leader of the Hindus, the others be damned. As if this were not enough, he drives home the point by refusing to wear the Muslim skullcap. Why? Will he become impure if he wears the cap? Each one of us Hindus celebrates Eid with the Muslims, don't we? Why can't our leaders celebrate as well then?

This reads like a propaganda tract by a Congress proxy, not a factual news report or realistic analysis. By gratuitously linking this unrelated incident to the needlessly inflated skullcap episode, the reporter betrays that he is robotically following a pre-set political agenda parroting for the millionth time, the ideological rants made fashionable by the Congress and the Left parties.[1] Those who have read previous chapters of this book can judge for themselves how far Modi's conduct is from the hateful persona being attributed to him. But Panday, sitting in Delhi, has more poison to vomit:

1 For a detailed account of media mischief on the skullcap story, see chapter 16, "Of Skullcaps and Puppies."

> Will the government initiate an inquiry against this mall? Will it ensure that such conduct is never repeated? Will Modi speak about this despicable conduct in any of his addresses? Impossible. Firstly, because Modi perhaps supports such things. Those wayward Muslims must be kept out. If this is racial discrimination, so be it. It will only get Modi more votes. Secondly, Modi has hardly shown the courage to speak against regressive social trends. He likes to flow with them, not challenge them. And in an election year, he will even be happy to fan them if it helps him get more votes. Net result: don't expect any action from the Gujarat government. And by taking no action, the government will encourage others to do similar loathsome things…. Dubai, and its Sheikhs, are far more liberal than Gujarat or its current leaders are.
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> These days, I am not surprised by any such news emanating from Gujarat. I wouldn't even be surprised if Modi one day declared Gujarat a Hindu state. The only thing that would stop him is the Constitution. In political terms, Modi has already done to Gujarat what the Constitution doesn't permit. But in real terms, he will have to wait till he becomes PM, and his party garners enough numerical strength to change the Constitution. Modi-lovers, work hard at this goal!
>
> The real truth is that what happened in the Ahmedabad mall is shocking, but entirely expected from the polarised Hindu state of Gujarat. Even when it's not overtly visible, this kind of discrimination against Muslims is palpable all over. Modi panders to these feelings. And wins elections. And then he rewards his people by not protecting such acts. One feeds off another. Do we want this all over India?

It is worth noting that there were no protests by Muslims of Ahmedabad against the alleged discrimination. The footfall of Muslim customers during Eid remained unaffected. And yet, Muslims all over India, and globally, were sought to be convinced by the Congress friendly media that Modi is a threat to the well-being of Muslims and therefore, they should do all they can to stop his rise to power at the Centre.

This kind of incessant hate-Modi campaign by the media, at the behest of the Congress and the Left Parties, has dangerous implications for the future of our country. At a time when a section of Muslims in India, as well as globally, are in an explosive mood and have come to believe in terrorism as a legitimate response to their real and imaginary grievances, those who are working hard to encourage persecution complex among Muslims on imaginary grounds, are playing with fire. This has the unfortunate effect

of people treating even their legitimate grievances with mistrust. Nowhere else in the world have mainstream political parties and mainstream media joined hands to instigate an already agitated religious minority against the majority, even when the latter is going out of its way to accommodate the aspirations of the minority.

In another such instance in Rajkot, the *chowkidar* of a private housing society set himself on fire because the owners of that society fired him from the job. Since he would not leave the living quarters alloted to him, they tried evicting him from the living quarters given to him by filing a law suit that he had misused the facility by illegally encroaching on the society's land to build extra rooms for his family. The housing society had no connection with Modi or the BJP. It was a case of a local conflict between a private employer and employee. And yet the news was given prominent coverage in Gujarati as well as national papers and splashed on prime-time TV channels in Gujarat and Delhi to build a case that in "Modi's Gujarat" atrocities were being committed on the poor.

Fortunately, in this case, the *chowkidar* was a Hindu not a Muslim. Instead of stopping him from taking the drastic step, Congressmen actually instigated him to immolate himself. They had made prior arrangements for filming his threat of self-immolation. It was a clear case of abetment of suicide, but the media happily used it as proof of Modi's callousness towards the poor.

While in Gujarat, I was also witness to Congressmen raise hell over elopement of young lovers as "proof" that women are not safe in Modi's Gujarat. It is a common joke in Gujarat that Congressis have gone so berserk in their panic about Modi's rising popularity that even if a housewife burns her *daal* or *chapattis* due to oversight, they blame it on Modi.

Fanning Flames over Ban on Cow Slaughter: In contrast to the frivolous issues mentioned above, a section of the Kasai community among Muslims can indeed claim to have something resembling a "real" cause of complaint against Modi's government. They are at war with the BJP over the relatively stricter implementation of the ban on cow slaughter in Gujarat. Beef is relatively far cheaper than goat meat. Therefore, a lot of poor Muslim families opt for it. In addition, beef export to the Gulf countries is a very lucrative business, especially since the Central government gives huge subsidies to promote the "pink revolution" by enhancing meat export from India. Most meat exporters in India are

Muslims. Therefore, this subsidy is seen as a bribe to strong-arm elements within the Muslims who can keep a hold over the Muslim vote bank.

Unlike most people in North India, Gujaratis take the sacredness of cows seriously, and display their commitment through concrete positive measures for protecting cows and taking care of their health even when the cows are old and have, therefore, stopped giving milk. Hence police crackdowns on smuggling of cows across the border are common. This is not to suggest that the police are always serious about stopping cows from being illegally transported for slaughter. Like illegal liquor sale, this too yields hefty bribes to the police. Vigilante groups of VHP are also alleged to be involved in nabbing trucks carrying slaughtered animals and getting them confiscated by the police. This issue evokes strong sentiments on both sides.

By and large, traditional Gujarati Muslims are not in favour of cow slaughter because of shared cultural values. Given the overwhelming sentiment in Gujarat against cow slaughter, even Muslim leaders of the Congress Party cannot take up this issue openly, but add fuel to the simmering fire behind the scenes. Congress-propped "secular" NGOs make it out as if restrictions on cow slaughter are an assault on the religious freedom of Muslims, thus feeding on the sense of victimhood among Muslims even on an issue where a section of Muslims are violating the law.

Demand for More Power to Farm Sector: The most "serious" charge thus far raised by Congress Party stalwarts against Modi is his refusal to give more than eight hours of dedicated power supply for the farm sector even though every village gets 24x7 power supply for domestic use. Many of the big landholders would like many more hours of power so that they can draw out more water from tube wells to irrigate their fields. Modi refuses to yield ground on this issue despite Gujarat producing surplus power. He reasons that, without reducing dependence on underground water, Gujarat will perpetuate the water crisis. Therefore, it should avoid pumping out excessive amounts of ground water. Modi's government has invested heavily in expanding canal network, water harvesting structures, and drip irrigation, thus making Gujarat one of the few states where the water table has begun to register an appreciable rise. He has carried out a massive awareness campaign on the long-term implications of emptying the bowels of earth of all water. Unlike during power starved Congress regimes, today each village is getting assured electricity for domestic use

as well as for farms with reasonable restriction only on unlimited use of tube well motors. That is why the Congress is unable to evoke mass support in favour of its ecologically-unsound demand.

Making Martyrs of BJP Dissidents: Another oft repeated charge of Congressmen against Modi is that Keshubhai, Zadaphia, and several such BJP stalwarts have been side lined by NaMo. This is touted as the ultimate proof of his authoritarian and intolerant ways. The same charge is repeated *ad nauseum* by leftist NGOs and journalists as unmistakeable evidence of Modi's hunger for uncontrolled power. It is not as if these BJP leaders are paragons of virtue. They have a tainted track record on many fronts, including promoting Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Therefore, the lofty sympathy displayed by Congressmen for the worst of BJP leaders, who quit the party after Modi's rise to power, does not command any respect in Gujarat.

This is specially true because, none have been able to point out what Modi has ever done to harm Keshubhai and others, whereas there is plenty of evidence to show that Keshubhai's group has not only indulged in malevolent and baseless personal attacks on Modi, but have also joined forces with the Congress in desperate bids to defeat Modi in each and every election since 2002. By contrast, even when faced with slander, Modi has never once retaliated against Keshubhai, or said a bad word against him. Infact, after winning the 2012 election, in which Keshubhai & Co had subjected Modi to all forms of calumny, one of the first things Modi did on receiving the election results was to visit Keshubhai's home, touch his feet, and seek his blessings as an elder who was once a BJP father figure. Keshubhai & Co. got marginalised because of their self-destructive politics as Congress allies, not because Modi did anything to crush them. Recently, Keshubhai has also had to eat humble pie and rejoin the BJP because he failed to carry even his Patel community with him, leading to the electoral decimation of the new party he had floated.

The Anti-Modi Factions within BJP

I had heard that there was a lot of discontent and anger among BJP MLAs and ministers since Modi is alleged to be a control freak. I interviewed several BJP MLAs but none spoke ill of Modi. In fact, they felt charged by his energy and the easy formal and informal access they have to Modi, who has institutionalised a proper consultative mechanism for party MLAs by involving them in defining priorities and given them a

meaningful role in overseeing government programs, though without the power to create obstructions once decisions are taken. Some of my interviews with BJP MLAs describing the new energy generated by this culture of participation and accountability will be published later. But there is no denying that many within the BJP are not happy with Modi because he has blocked avenues of corruption to a very large extent and forced the MLAs to take their job as people's representatives seriously. And yet, I was not able to get such BJP leaders to go on record with their criticism of Modi. Therefore, when a BJP MP from Delhi said that she would introduce me to an MLA who would explain to me how evil Modi is, I took a special trip with her to go and meet that MLA. The meeting turned out to be hilarious. She kept egging him to reveal all the evil deeds of Modi while the MLA kept denying he had any such tales to tell. She then told me, he was just being over cautious and that I should meet him on the quiet by myself. So I took a special trip to Baroda to go meet him and spent two-three hours talking to him. He only made one complaint: Some of Modi's ministers and BJP MLAs are corrupt and incompetent even though, Modi's own integrity is totally above board.

This is indeed a common refrain among people both within the BJP as well as in Gujarati society at large. Not all BJP ministers and MLAs measure up to the standard Modi has set for his administration. Piyush Patel, an old associate of Modi, though he is not in the BJP, had the following insightful observation on this:

> A political party is like Shiv ji *ki baraat*–the mythological marriage procession of Lord Shiva. It has snakes, scorpions, drug addicts, along with *sanyasis*, *tapasvis,* and a host of ordinary creatures. Modi, like Shiva, has to like Neelkanth—swallow a lot of poison. But he has tried to strengthen good people within his party while keeping a check on the corrupt and inefficient. He can't create a party of saints, especially since he has always been under siege by Congressmen, as well as the BJP's central leadership in Delhi. He can't disband the party he has inherited. He can only try to improve it. On that front, even his worst critics admit that the BJP under Modi is far healthier as an organisation, than it was during Keshubhai's or any other time. He has led by example and is changing the model of governance through building institutional checks against corruption rather than merely using punitive action. Since his own credentials are totally above board, that also acts as a deterrent and restraint.

CHAPTER 21

Nightlife in Gujarat Cities & Picnics on Footpaths

Changing Role and Perceptions about Gujarat Police

You can judge from the number of young unescorted women out on the streets every night at odd hours that we feel much safer in Gujarat. Criminals don't act with the kind of impunity that they do in many other states, especially my home state of Uttar Pradesh.
A young female IT Professional from UP

Modi sahib's biggest support comes from Muslim women because they feel their sons are not going wayward anymore, they are taking to education while their daughters can avail of the same opportunities and freedom that Hindu women from liberal families enjoy… Even my daughter is out late into the night enjoying with her friends. This was unthinkable for a family like ours 15 years ago...Gujarat is one of the safest places for women….
Muslim taxi owner in Ahmedabad

At the start of my Gujarat study, I had stayed with some family friends who had moved from Patna to Ahmedabad just about eight months prior to my stay with them. On the very first night, they insisted I experience the unique nightlife of cities in Gujarat and took me for a tour of the city past 11 p.m. They were keen to show me why moving to Gujarat for them was a very liberating experience because in Patna and other cities of Bihar, even men hesitate to be out at night, leave alone young women.

This was the time when the anti-rape agitation in Delhi and other cities was at its fever pitch. The sense of insecurity due to never-ending incidents of abduction, rape, and murders had brought out lakhs of people to protest on the streets in numerous towns and cities of India. Even in Delhi one hardly sees unaccompanied women on the streets past 10 p.m. But Ahmedabad presented a totally different scenario for women. It has

an active nightlife for both women and men, and that too cutting across all classes, castes, and communities.

Satvic Night Picnics

Nightlife in India is usually associated with the lifestyle of the westernised elite in metros. It means late night parties in private homes of the rich or in five star hotels where serving alcohol is considered a must. It is also synonymous with hanging out in pubs and discotheques where liquor is considered a necessary accompaniment. By contrast, the nightlife of Gujarati cities is mostly liquor-free and is lived out largely on the streets, on footpaths, and crowded markets with lots of eateries that come to life only in the evening. One sees as many working class families as middle and upper class people at their regular roadside hangouts. This is not to deny the existence of private parties in elite homes where people serve liquor on the quiet. But that form of entertainment is relatively uncommon in Gujarat. The Gujarati elite do not flaunt liquor parties, even if they organise them.

Every Gujarat city has its own unique set of late night hangouts. For example, Manek Chowk-a residential-cum-commercial area in the heart of the old Ahmedabad comes alive as a food bazaar only after 8 p.m. when the regular shops close down for the day. Amidst vendor carts selling snacks and *kulfi*, little eateries spread out very ordinary tables and chairs on the road. They don't have the glamour and ambience of Parisian cafés but are far more lively and vibrant. In cafes in Paris or New York, one only sees adult couples or groups of adult friends. But in the restaurants, eateries, and hawker centres of Ahmedabad one sees entire families, including small children with parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, enjoying a late night meal or post-dinner snacks and ice creams. I saw young girls driving in on their scooties long past midnight to hang out at Manek Chowk and other lively spots in the city.

Vidisha, who I met at Manek Chowk around 1:30 a.m., is in her early 20's. She is in the final year of a chartered accountancy degree. When I met her on January 13, 2013, she and her friends were standing and chatting away near their scooties. She told me she returns home after finishing her tuitions at about 11 to 11:30 p.m. It is her daily routine to come to Manek Chowk around midnight after having dinner at home. Mostly, she comes alone on her scooty. But occasionally her cousins also come with her. She was emphatic in saying that she has never faced any

sexual harassment or other forms of lawless behaviour when she is out late at night. On occasions when her scooty tyre got punctured or there was some other mechanical problem, some or the other guy pushed her vehicle all the way to her house. She and her friends—both male and female—hang out at Manek Chowk as a daily routine at night.

There are very few places in the country where you will you see women street vendors carrying on with their work till 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. in the night. Since there is a heavy footfall of customers at these eateries till late in the night–one finds street vendors, including young girls, selling various items of daily use, especially fruits and vegetables, till as late as the customers last. For example, on the night of January 12, 2013 three teenage sisters from Bapunagar, selling fruit and sugar cane, told me they were going to be there all night since the next day was Makar Sankranti–a major festival. Therefore, they would have good business all night. During festivals, certain hawker markets are open virtually all night. On CG Road, I had a long chat with a young teenage girl, along with her younger brother, pushing her vendor cart back home at 1.30 a.m.

Addabazi on Footpaths

The most fascinating part of nightlife in urban Gujarat is the extensive use of wide footpaths on arterial roads for family picnics, or by dating couples, or for *addabazi* (regular meeting points) by men and women--both young and old. The most popular spots are the sidewalks on river bridges—be it Sabarmati in Ahmedabad or Tapi in Surat. People just sit on the side walks of river bridges to enjoy the cool night breeze till the wee hours of the morning in Surat, Ahmedabad, and other cities. It is common for families to bring their dinners in big tiffin carriers and spread the food out on newspapers or mats they have brought from home. Street vendors do brisk business selling snacks, balloons and toys for children. Kids run around, play games while the elders chat away for hours. Hindu and Muslim couples from poorer crowded neighbourhoods sitting on footpaths, or on road side benches, engrossed in 'private chats' away from the family gaze but in full public view, is a common sight. This is made possible only because cities in Gujarat actually have relatively clean sidewalks with comfortable public benches.

Given the Gujarati penchant for enjoying cool river breeze at night, Modi has given high priority to development of riverfronts as recreational hubs for citizens. While this is common in Europe, America, and other

developed countries, in India Gujarat seems to be the only state to have taken riverbank development seriously. The banks of Yamuna river in the capital of India are so filthy and stinking because they are used as garbage dumps. Even a brief visit to the banks of Yamuna in Delhi or Ganga in Kanpur for religious rituals has become a serious health hazard.

Riverside development in Gujarat started with the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad, followed by Tapi riverbank development in Surat, but is now spreading to even smaller towns. For instance, Banaskantha doesn't have a river; it only has a canal flowing through its centre. In this small town too professionally landscaped parks, shopping plazas, an aesthetically organised vegetable market, hawker centres and a long walking trail with recreational facilities are being developed at a rapid pace all along the canal.

Implications for Muslim Women

I found it noteworthy that families from crowded inner city Muslim neighbourhoods actually come to Hindu localities for late night outings. In Muslim dominated areas at night one sees mostly men on the streets, no women. Likewise, one is not likely to see unescorted Muslim girls hangout around snack shops late at night in Muslim dominated parts of cities. They all come for fun to Hindu areas, indicating a sense of security and move away from the ghetto mindset.

During decades of religious polarisation due to repeated riots, especially during the 1990's, Muslims were really afraid to go into Hindu quarters and vice-versa. This fear restrained people even when there were no riots. Today one finds any number of burka-clad Muslim women in 100 per cent Hindu areas even late at night, not just in Ahmedabad but in almost every city of Gujarat. One saw plenty of working class Muslim families come out for late night snacks or dinner. They were obviously from conservative families women were wearing burkas, though no one had covered their faces. One also saw young burka clad Muslim women come as pillion riders on motorbikes. Outside the neatly paved enclosures of corporate offices, one saw little boys and girls of Hindu and Muslim families playing ball and *langdi taang*. My host family told me such scenes are fairly normal and routine in Ahmedabad. This was confirmed during subsequent visits. A Muslim taxi owner told me:

> Even my daughter is out late into the night enjoying with her friends. This was unthinkable for a family like ours 15 years ago. The general perception among both the Hindus and Muslims is that Gujarat is one of the safest places to live for women. That is why we don't have incidents of women being abducted or little children held for ransom or trafficked in the way it is happening in Delhi. I don't say Gujarat has zero crime. No country in the world can claim that. But the crime rate is much lower than in other states and organised gangs have been brought under tight control.
>
> Modi sahib's biggest support comes from Muslim women because they feel their sons are not going wayward anymore, they are taking to education while their daughters can avail of the same opportunities and freedom that Hindu women from liberal families enjoy. Men are coming home for dinner and spending time with their wives.

The former Additional Director General of Police and now the head of the Waqf Board in Gujarat, A.I. Syed, explained how marginalisation of criminal elements among Muslims had given greater freedom to Muslim women:

> During Congress regimes, goonda elements among the Muslims got a lot of encouragement. There used to be many Muslim *bhais* (dons) in those days. That made the lives of Muslim women far more insecure. Moreover, it helped project a negative image of the Muslim community and created prejudice against them. Since the anti-social elements among VHP and Bajrang Dal have been put in place and given the message that they won't be allowed to get away by terrorising Muslims, the Muslims do not feel the need to have their own dons to confront Hindu goondas. Consequently, women are leading freer lives even in erstwhile traditional Muslim localities.

Indeed, the most fascinating sight for me was that of teenage girls and young women, many of them Muslim, riding their two wheelers alone, or with another female on pillion, way beyond midnight. No one gave them a second look.

Today, one sees any number of Hindus also visiting all-Muslim areas at night, including the once-dreaded Juhapura, for non-vegetarian food. However, their number is still small in comparison to the far greater flow of Muslims in Hindu localities. Firstly, not many Gujarati Hindus eat

non- veg food. Secondly, 100 per cent Muslim areas like Juhapura remain citadels of Congress politicians who continue to work hard at keeping the divisive spirit and mutual mistrust alive. By contrast, the mandate given to BJP leaders is to promote goodwill between the two communities.

Vibrant Economy Curbs Crime Syndicates

Rais Khan Pathan, a former right hand man of Teesta Setalvad, who later fell out with her, explains how overall stricter implementation of laws has brought enhanced safety for Muslims and greater avenues for economic advancement:

> Today Muslims do not rise in defense of their community's dons, who were involved in illicit liquor brewing, smuggling contraband, drug peddling etc. But police crackdown alone cannot marginalise goondas and people in illicit trades. Take my own example; I had a flourishing *gutka* manufacturing business based in Mumbai. But my biggest supply chain was in Gujarat. Now there is strict enforcement of a ban on *gutka* in the state because of its cancer-causing effects. In most other states *gutka* ban is not strictly enforced. But in Gujarat, we had to shut shop. Though the ban caused a major setback to my flourishing business, I could easily switch over to other businesses and make decent money. Today, there are innumerable legitimate avenues for economic advancement available to Muslims, along with a massive increase in educational opportunities. Therefore, young Muslims of today feel no attraction for crime.

Nightlife Without Tipsy Revelry

During my January 2013 visit, I talked to several young couples in Ahmedabad on three consecutive nights. Most of these couples in their late 20's or early 30's, said they live in joint families. Some had come home for a vacation from England or America. Many said they feel much safer in Ahmedabad than in London or New York The young men were from diverse professional backgrounds, including doctors and IT professionals. Severals of these young women were also professionals. On weekends they routinely meet on CG Road to sit and chat till late into the night. The women told me their in-laws go to bed early, but the families have never expressed any anxiety about their staying out till late hours because they feel safe in Ahmedabad.

Such conversations were repeated during subsequent visits to Ahmedabad and other cities. Almost all said that an important reason

why rowdy behaviour was rare in cities of Gujarat, is the culture of restraint thanks to the official prohibition of liquor sales in in the state. Prohibition in Gujarat has been in place for decades in deference to Mahatma Gandhi's strong belief that liquor saps the physical and moral well being of society.

Despite my strong commitment to Bapu's political vision, I had always opposed state-imposed prohibition as an authoritarian measure that leads to liquor smuggling and emergence of bootlegging mafias. But hearing Gujaratis link social safety to prohibition made me seriously rethink my position. I admit that I did not seek out the elite party- going crowd that serves liquor on the sly. I only talked to people on the streets as well as women in poor *bastis*. The latter are the fiercest supporters of prohibition because habitual drunkards among the poor are far more prone to indulging in domestic violence. Prohibition is also very popular among Muslims.

But even the upper class youngsters I met on the streets of Ahmedabad and other cities of Gujarat during subsequent visits, strongly defended prohibition even while each and every one of them admitted that liquor was freely available everywhere in Gujarat. Almost everyone said that people interested in alcohol know the suppliers just as they would know of their doctors or tailors. One phone call and you can have the brand of your choice delivered to your home within no time. Many drive down to the Rajasthan border to purchase their supplies. But most people who want a drink get it from a local supplier.

However, by all accounts, bootlegging mafias have been substantially curbed in the last ten years even though cheap *desi* liquor is readily available even for the poor at a price. The defenders of prohibition include people who admitted to having occasional drinks in private parties or small gatherings of friends. Several of these young people have been to Europe and America for long or short periods. Most of them, including women, had the external trapping of westernisation—denim jeans, English medium education, and so on.

I found this very puzzling because in most other metros, and state capitals, young people of such a background would consider state-imposed prohibition a serious assault on their freedom. Therefore, I had long roadside conversations on this issue with several young and middle-aged persons. Their reasoning in favour of prohibition can be summed up as follows: 'People may occasionally drink in parties or even

in the privacy of their homes, but no one in Gujarat dares indulge in drunken behaviour on streets or in public places due to the official ban on liquor. The police have strict instructions to lock up such people right away; they even publish their photographs in the local newspapers the next day. That acts as the biggest restraining factor. Even when people drink in private parties, or among friends, they do it in moderation so that even their parents often don't get to know. The total absence of drunkards in public places is an important reason why Gujarat is much safer for women.'

I asked several groups of young people if they missed pub culture and discotheque parties. The over-all consensus was summed up by two young women taking a stroll around 12.30 a.m.:

> Discotheques do exist in Gujarat but do not serve liquor. Abstaining from liquor is a very small price to pay for a sense of safety and security. Gujaratis know how to enjoy life, but we also know that drinking alcohol is not necessary for enjoyment. One can have a lot of fun without alcohol consumption. Don't you see for yourself how relaxed the environment is all around us even late into the night? You see families with young women, and even children, enjoying their night out. In Delhi, people are afraid to get into a bus at 9 p.m. because buses are full of drunkards. The conductors dare not even insist on their buying tickets because they know these alcoholics can turn violent. You won't find such behaviour in Gujarat. People are much calmer and far less prone to picking up quarrels in public or getting into violent fracas over petty matters. It is to do with social restraints.

Almost all the working class men and women I conversed with also said that wife beating on account of drunkenness and other forms of crimes have come down even in poor *bastis* ever since bootlegging mafias have been brought under tighter control. Some twenty years ago I had personally witnessed liquor being brewed in a slum right behind Gandhi ashram.

It could well be said that prohibition has been in force in Gujarat since decades, so its good or bad effects can't be attributed to Modi. However, liquor-related criminality and social violence has come down in Gujarat because now it is only small-time bootleggers who are involved in illicit liquor trade to earn a modest living. The big dons are mostly out of business or behind bars.Others have left the state due to relatively greater

discipline among the police today. Rowdy behaviour on the streets or in public places, whether by political dons or petty lumpens, is dealt with more strictly.

That is why even though liquor is freely available under the table, its consumption is not visible in public spaces. Even private dance parties are far more sober in Ahemdabad than in discotheques or private 'farm houses' of Metros. In Delhi, Gurgaon, and Noida, for instance, owners of showrooms in fancy malls where the rich and famous go shopping, are beginning to request city authorities to shut down pubs because anti-social elements gather around such joints and make the environment unsafe. Almost all pubs and discotheques hire marshals and musclemen as bouncers to deal with the wealthy goondas who gravitate towards such places.

Pubs have mushroomed even in smaller cities and towns of India and become *addas* for anti-social elements. For instance, on July 12, 2012, a 16-year-old girl was stripped and molested by around 30 men outside a pub in full public view on G.S Road, one of the busiest places in Guwahati, Assam. She had gone to celebrate a friend's birthday. But, after her friends left, she was singled out and attacked. In Tenali, Andhra Pradesh, a 45-year-old woman named Bethala Kanthasuneela was beaten up and killed by a group of drunkards who emerged out of a local bar in a popular shopping centre called Gandhi Chowk. They beat up and pushed the woman under a lorry because she protested against their waylaying and assaulting her daughter, a B. Tech. student. Such instances have become commonplace in most states of India.

Several regions of India have witnessed powerful anti-liquor movements with rural women in the forefront. They have all demanded the shutting down of liquor shops in their respective villages on following counts:

- Liquor consumption further impoverishes already poor households with liquor addicts unable to control their urge even if it means starvation for the rest of the family. It not only destroys the health of the man but also has an adverse effect on the nutritional status of other family members and education of children. Drunkards are far more prone to beating up their wives and children.
- Liquor shops attract anti-social elements and the village environment becomes unsafe for all, especially women who fear stepping out of the house in the evenings.

- Liquor contracts are cornered by political mafias who are able to strengthen their hold over the political and social life of villages due to their ill-gotten wealth and clout with the police. Government's liquor outlet auctions in Haryana, Punjab, UP, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra etc are a frightening sight where politicians of all hues come with scores of gunmen in naked display of goonda might.

Since the rural anti-liquor movements have mostly been organised by left-leaning organisations that mobilise poor peasants and the landless labourers, they received enthusiastic endorsement of feminists. However, when urban communities protest against proliferation of bars and pub culture, which also become gravitation centres for anti-social elements, it is condemned as a retrogressive and "right wing" demand aimed at curbing individual freedom.

Citizens' Confidence in Law and Order

During my very first visit to Ahmedabad at the start of my Gujarat study in January 2013, one of my Twitter followers from the city wrote to me saying, "While you are there, go visit a police station. You would be shocked (pleasantly)." There was visible pride in his urging me to go and notice the change in the system of policing in Gujarat. During the course of my travels through Gujarat, I visited numerous small town and village police stations and have no hesitation in saying they are among the best in India. The infrastructure and performance of police in big cities like Surat and Ahmedabad, is far superior to most cities of the other states of India. More than in police stations, the change is visible in people's perception of the law and order situation. Sexual harassment of women in public places or incidents of abduction and gang rape of women have become routine in numerous states of India. But they are relatively rare in Gujarat. But women are safe only because men—both rich and poor—also feel safe. Twenty six year old Govind, the driver of the private taxi that took me from Ahmedabad to Gandhinagar, says:

> Even at night, there are no highway dacoities or *loot maar* in Gujarat, as is happening in other states. Therefore, it is good for our business. But all this is not just due to police crackdowns. This government has created work and job opportunities for all. For example, there is a poor adivasi settlement around Ambaji Mandir. Some of the men in this *basti* used to indulge in crimes and loot. That community has now been given a contract for garbage recycling.

> So they are very happy about having a regular source of income and are busy making money from that. The government has a plan to make Gujarat a Zero Garbage state with its slogan, 'Reduce, Recycle, and Reuse.' So it is win-win for all.

India's Capital: Butt of Jokes

In almost all my conversations on the streets of Ahmedabad and other cities, the capital city of India, Delhi, always emerged as a negative counterpoint and butt of jokes with regard to the law and order situation:

> *Aapke shehar mein to car parking ko lekar hi goliyan chal jaati hai, log ek doosre ka sir phod dete hain. Zara si car mein kisi ne takkar laga di aur chota sa dent pad gaya, to maara maari ho jaati hai.* (People start shooting each other in your city because of petty conflicts over car parking. If someone so much as puts a small dent on another person's car, there is a major brawl) In Gujarat you don't see such behaviour. Nobody goes berserk if their car is dented by another vehicle. While road rage has become very common in cities like Delhi, people in Gujarat rarely explode over such issues.

I saw this borne out at least half a dozen times during my visits to Gujarat, including twice when the taxi I was travelling in hit other vehicles. This contrast in behavior is partly due to the fact that in Delhi drunken drivers are very common. Not so in Gujarat. A group of couples enjoying their *kulfis* while chatting away on the footpath talked about riot-free Gujarat being linked to greater sense of security:

> We saw endless curfews when we were growing up. Every Hindu and Muslim festival would lead to clashes. Today, every community is able to celebrate its festivals in peace, be it Eid or Navratras. We feel fortunate that our children are growing up without seeing curfews. They don't even know what the word means. No one lives in anxiety for their physical safety the way we did when we were growing up.

This is not to imply Gujarat is crime free, but most people I talked to on the streets felt their state is far better than most other states of India. That is why the anti-rape agitation, which swept many towns and cities of India, did not evoke much response in Gujarat because women don't feel as endangered being out on their own as they do in other parts of India.

Non-Invasive Police Even on Eve of High Security Events

The most remarkable thing about Gujarat cities is the sparse presence of police on the roads. In all the days that I spent walking or driving down with friends late into the night in Ahmedabad or other cities, I did not see any police barricades for checking of vehicles–something very common in Delhi. This was particularly surprising during my January 2013 visit because I reached Ahmedabad just before Makar Sankranti-the famed kite festival, as well as the high-powered Vibrant Gujarat Summit in Gandhinagar. Therefore, a large contingent of ministers, ambassadors, and corporate honchos from both India and abroad were commuting daily between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. But barring security measures in and around the venue of the Summit, the rest of the twin cities seemed as relaxed as ever. No one mentioned any crackdown on Muslim or Dalit *bastis* or poor slums. No mention of preventive detentions of randomly targeted people. It is noteworthy that Modi himself is on top of the hit list of jehadi Muslim groups who have vowed revenge against him for the 2002 riots. And yet, not once did I witness traffic being stopped to enable VIP movement.

By contrast, in Delhi even ordinarily, city roads are littered with police barricades even on normal days especially at night. Motorists, scooterists, and truck drivers are routinely stopped for checks at night. These barricades are placed so thoughtlessly, and the 'checking' of vehicles is done so brainlessly that they only end up causing nuisance to the ordinary citizens while providing an opportunity to the police to fleece truck and private taxi drivers, as well as young couples returning home tipsy after partying.

Before the Republic Day and Independence Day, in Delhi and other important cities, the police arbitrarily pick up thousands of poor people under draconian preventive detention laws on the pretext of curbing goonda elements. Most of these people are innocent rickshaw pullers or street hawkers who live on the pavements, and other homeless poor or slum dwellers. The Muslim youth are a routine target. Nobody bothers to ask whether those locked up under preventive detention laws are genuine goondas, and if so, why were they out in the first place? Why round them up to show 'action' before certain events involving VVIPs? One did not see or hear of any such crackdown in Gujarat cities before Republic Day or Vibrant Gujarat Summit.

Fair Representation of Muslims in Police

It is noteworthy that Gujarat leads all states in the number of Muslim policemen posted in police stations. To quote a *Times News Network* report of November 12, 2012, Gujarat has more than proportional representation of Muslims at the level it matters most—that is, the *thana* level. In response to an RTI enquiry filed by *the Times of India,* the home ministry shared the following data: In Gujarat, where Muslims constitute 9.1 per cent of the state's population, 10.6 per cent of policemen posted in police stations are Muslims. Since this is higher than the proportion of Muslims in the state's overall population, it indicates absence of discrimination even in police recruitment in Gujarat. In almost all other states of India, the number of Muslims in police stations is far lower than the percentage of Muslim population of that state. For instance, Kerala's Muslim population is 24.7 per cent, but Muslims constitute only 11.6 per cent of force. Muslims constitute 25.2 per cent of West Bengal's population but comprise only 8.4 per cent of the police force. But this increase in the number of Muslim policemen in Gujarat has been done without making any song and dance about it, and without creating special quotas.

The sense of optimism about their safety is palpable among all sections of Muslims, rich or poor. Their body language speaks for itself: To quote a Muslim businessman:

> Ask any police officer and he will tell you that policing in Gujarat has become much easier because there is no political interference by either the chief minister or anyone else in the government. Police stations in Muslim areas today have a far lighter workload now because criminal activities have come down dramatically in these areas. Earlier, Dariapur and Kalupur in Ahmedabad were the epicentres of anti-social activities. Most of the riots of the previous 50 years started from these areas and spread from there to the rest of the city. But in the last ten years, not a single such incident has been registered. For one, liquor and gambling dens have almost disappeared from these areas. Earlier, leave alone Hindus, even the educated among Muslims used to hesitate to go into those areas. But these areas are not feared any more. You see a lot of new construction activity in those areas because of new prosperity and there is hardly any crime there now. Crime-prone cities are those where there are organised criminal gangs. Such gangs don't operate with impunity in Ahmedabad or other cities.

The general perception of both Hindus and Muslims is that policing in Gujarat is far more professional than in most other states of India. This is not to rule out cases of police high-handedness. Police corruption is far from eliminated. But since Gujarat has in place a system of grievance redressal that has put checks on police tyranny.

I asked a young Muslim woman, who had come from Lucknow to work in the IT sector in Ahmedabad, what she had to say about national media reporting that crimes against women were 'increasing' in Gujarat. She replied, "You don't judge law and order from police department statistics because there is systematic under-reporting of crime in India. States that register lower crime rates are not necessarily the safest places for citizens. The most important indicator is citizens' perception of safety. If you take that as the benchmark, you can judge from the number of young unescorted women out on the streets every night at odd hours that we feel much safer in Gujarat. Criminals don't act with the kind of impunity that they do in many other states, especially my home state of Uttar Pradesh."

CHAPTER 22

Of Trusteeship, Dharma & Compassion

NaMo's Connect with Gandhi ji & Gautam Buddha

It is my conviction and shraddha (faith) that on economic issues, Gandhi is relevant even today...If I have such a powerful legacy, it is my responsibility to bring it to the world's attention…. In Buddhism, I see dharma entrenched in karuna (compassion). I believe compassion is the most valuable essence of life. When I formed the government, these values got ingrained even deeper. What attracts me about Buddha is his inclusive philosophy; secondly, his modernity; and thirdly, his belief in the importance of Sangathan—the idea of Sangha.
Narendra Modi in personal interview, 2013

"Narendrabhai used to give an hour long pravachan (discourse) on Mahatma Gandhi's *Vaishnav Jan bhajan* as an integral part of training programs for party workers. He would tell us that a BJP *karyakarta* (worker) should be one who understands and feels the pain of others. A BJP *karyakarta* should work for the *sukha* (well-being) of all and feel the *dukha* (pain) of all. If we want people to trust political leaders, we have to work for the well-being of all segments of society. If BJP *karyakartas* lead by working for social good, it will strengthen our nation as well as our *samaj* (society)."

This is how Rajkot-based BJP leader, Vijaybhai Rupani described the core message given by Narendra Modi to motivate party workers to prioritise *samaj seva* (service of society) while he was doing organisational work for the BJP. When I asked him to describe the themes of Modi's speeches, Vijaybhai said Narendrabhai talked a great deal about the importance of *karuna* (compassion) and selfless service among party workers. He emphasised all the values that are incorporated in the *Vaishnav Jan bhajan* (devotional song) associated with Gandhi ji. Rupani added:

> It is an intrinsic part of his political vision that building the organisation and recruiting party workers is not enough; we must have the political maturity to carry the *samaj* with us. If I had kept detailed notes of those training sessions in which Narendrabhai galvanised party workers, that compendium would have become renowned as an authoritative text on *Sangathan Shastra* (Treatise on Building Organisations).
>
> For instance, he would emphasise the mantra: *Pratyek karyakarta ke liye kaam aur pratyek kaam ke liye karyakarta*. (For every task, there must be a responsible party worker, and for every party worker, there must be identifiable work). Secondly, he taught us that without a sense of purpose, a sense of larger mission, a party worker becomes a cog in the wheel (*uthak baithak ka hissa*), performing routine tasks robotically. He was very effective in motivating BJP workers to do something meaningful for the country and for society. He paid a great deal of attention to creating good and honest workers. Most importantly, he paid minute attention to building systems.

I had already seen evidence of all this in Modi's bottom-up agenda of development and the zeal with which he had worked to improve systems of governance in order to enhance the quality of life and standard of living of the poor, especially in rural areas. However, whenever I mention his name in connection with Gandhi ji, people get enraged—as though I have said something sacrilegious.

So I thought it best to ask Modi during one of my interviews as to how he related to Mahatma Gandhi and what the *Vaishnav Jan bhajan* meant to him. This is what he had to say:

> Yes I have spoken on Gandhi ji's *Vaishnav Jan bhajan* at many places. In fact, I used to deliver hour-long speeches describing why Gandhi ji loved this *bhajan*. If we think carefully and dwell on each word of this song, composed 500 years ago, we will find that everything said in it is still relevant, especially for our public life. He speaks against corruption and importance of personal integrity. In short, it is a manifesto for public life and morality. So, I worked around the words and would say: *Jan pratinidhi to tene kahiye, jo peed parai jaane re; par dhukhe upkaar kare, tave man abhiman na aane re*. (A people's representative is one who feels the pain of others; one who removes the sorrows of others and yet does not let a trace of pride or arrogance come into his heart).

> This used to be part of my worker development programmes. I used to analyse each line of this *bhajan* and explain why Gandhi ji promoted these values in public life; it contains all the wisdom you need for public life. It is a great misfortune for our country that this bhajan is played only on October 2 at Rajghat. It should have become an instrument of inculcating moral values. Gandhi ji liked this bhajan because Gandhi's DNA and the elements of this *geet* match each other. I hold it up as a model of conduct for our party and RSS workers. In the RSS, there is an old tradition of remembering this bhajan every morning. Their *pratah smaran* (morning remembrance) starts with Gandhi ji's name.

I could not get the full one-hour recording of his speech to BJP party workers because Modi's speeches started getting recorded only after he became CM. However, I found small extracts of this theme in a speech Modi delivered to government employees as part of a series of *chintan shivirs* (self-reflection camps) to motivate them to become *karmayogis* (one who is wedded to doing his duty selflessly and with devotion). I present below my translation of the portions I was able to get hold of:

> Gandhi's favourite *geet* was *Vaishnav Jan* (one who has internalised Vishnu or the Divine; a pure hearted person). If the words of this *geet* are in your diary or echo in your home, in your office, you will not require anything more to live your life as a *karmayogi*. I had heard it for years before I realised its power. One day, suddenly early morning sometime in the year 1994-95, this song lit a spark in my heart. If you substitute the word *karmayogi* with *vaishnav jan,* you will understand the spirit that must inspire those in government. Each employee should be a *karmayogi*. *Vashnav jan* or *karmayogis* are those:
> Who understand the pain of others and help those who are in misery;
> Who do par *upkaar* (good to others), and yet do not let *ahankar* (ego or arrogance) enter their minds;
> Who do *vandana* (pay respect) to the whole world, but do not indulge in *ninda* (speak ill) of anyone;
> Who view all with *samdrishti* (treat everyone equally) and have given up *trishna* (personal hankering); A person who is in power must have *samdrishti* (treat all equally);
> Who keep their words, actions and thoughts pure;
> The mother of such a soul is blessed;
> Whose *vani* (voice) may get tired but never speaks *asatya* (untruth);

Whose hands never touch the wealth of others.
They do not succumb to worldly attachments and remain detached from material pleasures.
They have been enchanted by the name of God (Shri Ram).
Therefore, their heart is as holy as all the sacred pilgrimage sites put together.
A Vaishnav represents the absence of greed and deceit.
They have renounced all types of lust and anger.
Their virtues liberate their entire generation ....

This song was written hundreds of years ago. Even in that day and age, Narsinh Mehta knew about the dangers of corruption and greed. Friends, I urge you to recognise the power of this song and understand its message. Please keep the words of this song on your table and you will understand why Mahatma Gandhi acquired the strength that he had. He knew the power behind the lyrics of this song. I want that this song should become a source of power for each of us.

In his interview with me, Modi went on to describe how he has tried to implement Mahatma Gandhi's ideas in every aspect of his work:

It is my conviction and *shraddha* (faith) that even on economic issues, Gandhi is relevant even today. One of my lectures on the 100th anniversary of Devarbhai—who was the All India Congress president and a close colleague of Morarjibhai—deals with the relevance of Gandhi ji's ideas. Devarbhai was from my own village, Vadnagar, and had done excellent work for land reforms. My government had celebrated his 100th anniversary even though the Congress Party and the rest of the country did not even remember it. People were surprised and asked why the BJP government was honouring a Congress leader? But I see him as a freedom fighter who belongs to the nation. That day I had shared with the Gandhians at Sabarmati Ashram how all the decisions of my government are influenced by Gandhi ji's ideas and vision.

No government in India had ever thought of celebrating Gandhi Jayanti in the birthplace of the Mahatma in Porbandar. It used to be a small local event until my government started the tradition in 2003. We organised three programmes there:

- A vegetarian food festival because this issue is related with Mahatma Gandhi.
- A cleanliness campaign.
- A Khadi fashion show.

Some people oppose fashion shows and go to the extent of vandalising such events. Such incidents really sadden me deeply even though I don't speak about them. It is in my nature to show my strength through action. So I organised a fashion show to counter that negative mind-set.

On that occasion I gave a mantra, 'Before Independence, Khadi was for the nation; after Independence, let Khadi be used for fashion.' I made a special request to Vinoba ji's disciple Bal ji to grace the occasion. Due to Dwarkadas ji, I've always had good relations with Sarvodya people. Bal ji was very close to Vinoba ji and dressed like Gandhi ji. Since Bal ji came, other Sarvodya people came too. Now, a fashion show does not fit into their pattern of thinking. But I told the students of the NID (National Institute of Design) to help me promote Khadi in a modern way. So, with *Vaishnav* bhajan playing in the background, the NID students organised a Khadi show for us—Khadi in different styles and garments. Bal ji told me, "Narendrabhai, nobody could have imagined that one can promote Khadi in this manner." That set a new trend. Now, there are many who have started organising Khadi fashion shows.

When Naval Kishore Sharma was the Governor of Gujarat (he was a very talented leader of the Congress Party he publicly praised this innovation in promoting Khadi saying that when he was the chairman of Khadi Board, it never occurred to him to promote Khadi in these ways. For instance, on Gandhi Jayanti, the Khadi Board offers a special discount on Khadi but I make it a campaign by leading a procession to Khadi Haat to buy the fabric. On that day, our government issues full-page ads for the promotion of Khadi. But I don't insist people to become *khadidhari*—that is, wear only Khadi and nothing else. My appeal is that if you have numerous varieties of fabrics in your home, why not make it a point to ensure that Khadi is one of them? Just make it a point to buy Khadi products whenever you can. This campaign is carried out all over the state. As a result, we have witnessed a 40 per cent increase in the sale of Khadi in that one week of Gandhi Jayanti.

I also introduced this tradition of offering a Khadi handkerchief and a book instead of offering a bouquet of flowers to dignitaries. I tell people if you give somebody flowers, within a day or two they will land in a pile of garbage. But if you give a book, it can pass on from person to person. So in every aspect of my social reform efforts, you will see the imprint of Gandhi. For instance, the emphasis on Samras Gaon (a village that has elected its panchayat through harmonious consensus) is basically Gandhi's ideology. Similarly, the *Jyotigram Yojana* providing 24x7 power supply to each village is inspired by Gandhi's idea that unless you uplift villages, you cannot uplift India.

At the time of inaugurating the *Jyotigram Yojana*, I would organise a big mela in that area to dedicate the new power station to that district. In each of those big events, there would be 2 to 2.5 lakh people since electricity was then a big issue in Gujarat. But I didn't collect all those people just to get political endorsement. Each mela was accompanied by an exhibition to educate people on the many uses of electricity—how potters or ironsmiths or *dhobis* can use electricity to improve their lives. There were actual demonstrations to show the multifaceted uses of electricity in the lives of various marginalised groups of society.

My purpose was to educate our people that power supply doesn't mean just watching television. If electricity doesn't bring value addition to your life then it is of little use. I also conveyed the message that Gandhi was never anti-technology by having a big picture of Gandhi ji looking through a microscope. Gandhi had a scientific mind; otherwise, why would he have taken so much interest in a microscope?

When I talk of environment, I use the photograph of Gandhi on a bicycle as a backdrop. My speaking 1,00,000 words or giving long speeches does not have the kind of impact that one photograph of Gandhi has. If I have such a powerful legacy, it is my responsibility to bring it to the world's attention. That is how the idea of building Mahatma Mandir as a unique convention centre in Gandhinagar came to me. Right now, Mahatma Mandir has reached 30 per cent completion though we have organised several mammoth events in it already. Wait until it is completed to understand what it stands for. It is fully imbued with Gandhi's spirit. For instance, we figured out at what degree Bapu's body inclined while walking with his trademark *lathi*. The pillars of Mahatma Mandir are inclined at exactly that angle. I have paid attention to the minutest detail of Gandhi's life. When it is complete, I will do a full spread-out of all these elements. Dandi March was a very major event in Gandhi's life. I have made a *Dandi Kutir* (hut to commemorate Gandhi's historic Dandi March at the start of Salt Satyagraha) in Mahatma Mandir. On the terrace, we will create a Gandhi Garden—this will be the biggest terrace garden in the world. In that garden we will bring alive, with the aid of technology, each year of Gandhi's life with a particular event connected with that period in such a manner that a child who walks through the garden will have enough material to know and understand the essentials of Gandhi.

Another unique feature of Mahatma Mandir is linked to my basic nature of bringing about connectivity among people (*mein moolta jodne ki pravriti wala hoon*). That is why we asked the people of Gujarat to bring some earth and water of their village for laying the foundation of Mahatma Mandir. Thus,

water and earth from 18,000 villages of Gujarat have gone into the foundation of Mahatma Mandir. We also brought earth and water from each state of India as well as from each of those countries where people of Indian origin have gone and settled to be part of the foundation of Mahatma Mandir. Gandhi was a world citizen. That is why we put the earth and water of every region of the world into the foundation of Mahatma Mandir.

Its foundation was laid on May 1, 2010, in the Golden Jubilee year of Gujarat. People from different villages and states of India came in processions with their earth and water. We held a big exhibition of Gandhi on that occasion.

On 2nd October, I always go to Porbandar to pay my homage to Bapu. Many people have visited Porbandar but very few had noticed that behind Gandhi ji's mother Putlibai's parental home, there is a 200-year-old rainwater harvesting structure. I felt that it is not enough that people just go and offer flowers at Gandhi ji's birthplace; let us arrange things in a manner that every visitor has to end up visiting that house and see the traditional rain harvesting arrangement. We created a tiny special bridge to reach Putlibai's house in order to let people see how Gandhi ji's ancestors valued water and harvested rain even 200 years ago.

I bring every little aspect of Gandhi ji's life into my work. In social forestry, that is, in planting trees outside forest areas, Gujarat is number one in India. I am not the kind who believes in astrology. Lots of people have commented that I am among the rare breed of netas who doesn't wear any gemstones on my fingers in the hope of bringing me good luck. However, when astrology comes in handy to drive home a positive message, I don't hesitate to use it. Somebody had sent me a book about the benefits of wearing different gemstones for drawing positive energy from their respective astrological planets. The book also talks about the specific trees beneficial for each astrological sign.

That gave me the idea of directing our forest department to dedicate one of our Van Mahotsavs (Forest Festival) to create a Rashivan (Planetary forest) in every municipal corporation. The Gujarat government has organised numerous Van Mahotsavs on different themes in every district to make social forestry a mass movement. Through the Rashivan idea I urge people to plant trees that are believed to be beneficial for their astrological sign.

We have also incentivized every village to have a panchvati (a green belt drawing its name from the forest in which Ram, Lakshman, and Sita lived during their years of exile). Apart from encouraging tree plantation, my basic idea was that longevity is increasing in India. Even in villages you do find people in their 80's or even 90's. What activity do they have left at that age? So

I decided to create pleasant places for senior citizens to socialize. Every village already has a Ram Mandir. I announced that the government would give a special grant for every village that decides to create a Panchvati next to its local Ram Mandir. It must have a lot of trees and comfortable benches. Some even have a children's playground attached to them. In the evening when people go to the temple for aarti, they can sit around in a relaxed environment. Now even couples come to enjoy an evening chat away from the family. I want the village culture to change and make space for young married couples to also have a place for a carefree chat.

In my village, there used to be an old bavadi (water tank), which had become a giant garbage bin for the village. I named it Jalmandir and got its property cleaned. "Secular" people may have trouble with my naming style. But I use such names because then you don't have to explain that people should keep the place clean and not throw garbage in it.

I have already announced that we will launch an all India campaign to make our country garbage free—make it Swachh and Nirmal Bharat (Clean and Pristine India)—to mark the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

There are so many old step wells in Gujarat, which are getting recharged due to our water harvesting efforts. These exquisitely beautiful structures are worth billions. I have revived so many of them. Gandhi's imprint is visible in all of this.

For traditional artisans we have created several big haats, like Dilli Haat – where we invite handicraft producers to come and sell their wares. The government pays their travel expenses as well as provide them board, lodging, and food. We sent adivasi artisans to Assam and Nagaland to learn to make high quality bamboo products.

Similarly, in Ambaji Mandir, thousands of devotees come every day and offer coconuts to the goddess. The practice was that the same coconut would be sent out to the market through the back door and be sold again to other devotees as an offering to the goddess. I stopped this and said any coconut offered to the goddess has to be broken right then and there. Ambaji Mandir Trust provides low priced food to people. So they were running a kitchen anyway. We worked out a system to use the coconut kernel to make a special nutritional sweet dish to be distributed free to tribal children at the time of midday meal in schools. And the top skin (hair) of coconuts are given free to tribals and OBCs for making toys. They were given special training into the art of toy making. That is another value addition. Thus we have not only stopped corruption in coconut offerings but also found nutritional and

employment solutions. This is part of putting our traditions and Gandhian values to creative use.

Samras Panchayats: Core Value of Gandhi in Action

In his conversations and speeches, Narendra Modi frequently admits to having learnt at the feet of many Gandhian freedom fighters and intellectual giants. For instance, as described in chapters 3 and 5, the very first move Modi made as CM on October 8, 2001, was to announce special incentives for villages that elected samras panchayats—a typically Gandhian idea. During the course of one of my interviews with him, I asked him from where he got the idea of Samras Panchayats. This is what Modi had to say:

> In our town, there were these two people—Dr. Dwarkadas Joshi and Vasantbhai Paresh. Dwarkadas Joshi was dedicated to Vinoba ji and Vasantbhai was a Gandhian and greatly influenced by Vivekanand. He was also a Sarvodayi and a bit of a revolutionary.
>
> From my very childhood, I was deeply impressed by the personality of Dwarkadas ji, who was a symbol of humility. His eyes, his speech, and his simplicity were very moving. During my childhood, I had heard him talk about Vinoba ji saying when there is a parliamentary election, there may be tension during the run-up to the election but later on, everything settles down.
>
> But, when there is a panchayat election, the village gets permanently divided. There are times when marriages fall apart and daughters are sent back from their in-laws' homes on this count. So, why can't we show this little maturity and have the entire village together decide who all should shoulder the responsibility of the panchayat? Hence, this idea remained latent in my mind since childhood.
>
> I could not implement this idea earlier because I had no influence with government affairs. Since I was assigned the task of building the organisation, I stayed focused on that and kept thinking of various ways and means to deliver good work in that field.
>
> But soon after becoming chief minister, I made the announcement for samras panchayats. The Congress Party and the media criticised me no end, calling me undemocratic and authoritarian. They accused me of destroying democracy. So one day I had a discussion with media persons and asked them: "If 51 versus 49 per cent can be democracy, if 60 versus 40 or 90 versus 10 can also be democracy, why can't 100 versus Zero be considered democracy?"

Gandhi's Trusteeship in Action

It is well known that Modi has lived like a wandering *sanyasi* during his long years as RSS *pracharak* as well as BJP organiser. He owned no assets until then. Even after becoming CM, he owns a modest house in Gandhinagar and hardly any personal assets.

His officers tell me, he uses just one room in the chief minister's bungalow, which has the most basic furniture—a bed, a work table, computer, TV, a couple of chairs, and books. He eats simple Gujarati food and is spartan in his habits. He may not wear Mahatma Gandhi style minimal clothing or live in a mud hut, but his personal lifestyle is very austere. He doesn't use an army of servants at home. There is just one person who cooks his meals and takes care of the one room he lives in. Even this lone personal staff is allowed to leave for home at 9 p.m.

Like Gandhi ji, he is obsessive about avoiding waste and never loses even a cheap Rs. two ballpoint pen that he normally uses. It lasts with him till its ink runs out. Even small personal items like comb and nail cutter last him for decades.

Gujarat government officers say that he guards public money with fierce zeal and does not allow any wastage because he has deeply internalised Gandhi ji's theory of trusteeship and believes that his job is to prevent misuse of public money and ensure that it is only used for public good.

His attempts to live up to people's expectations on coming to power—*Na khaoonga, na khaane doonga* (I will neither siphon off public money, nor let others do it)—have won him many adversaries who call him dictatorial on this account. Even though corruption has not been eliminated from Gujarat, he has worked with commitment to plug the sources of corruption by introducing systemic reforms that bring transparency and accountability. In the process, Gujarat has witnessed numerous innovative reforms in governance.

His commitment to Gandhi ji's philosophy of trusteeship became manifest even in the manner he announced, within a month of coming to power, that all the gifts presented to him by citizens, would be auctioned and given to a special corpus—Kanya Kelavani Fund—for supporting girls' education in the poorest districts of Gujarat. He has said often that after becoming CM, he considers himself public property. "Whatever gifts I receive after joining the government belong to the people of Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi's principle of trusteeship is what inspires me."

Inprint of Mahatma Buddha

As you enter NaMo's office near his residence, one sees a big statue of Gautam Buddha. I asked him why he chose Buddha's statue and not some other historical or religious figure. What attracts him most to the Buddha? This is the answer I got:

> Mahatma Buddha has also left a deep imprint on my life. In my personal room also, there are three-four statues of the Buddha. This particular one was given to me when I went to Chhattisgarh for a programme. It has been made by the Bastar tribals with one giant piece of wood—so that in itself makes it special.
>
> In Buddhism, I see dharma entrenched in *karuna* (compassion). I believe compassion is the most valuable essence of life. When I formed the government, these values got ingrained even deeper. What attracts me about Buddha is his inclusive philosophy; secondly, his modernity; and thirdly, his belief in the importance of *Sangathan*—the idea of *Sangha*. This underlies all his philosophy. I would often wonder how Buddha managed to reach all over the world. What was it about him that lit sparks everywhere he went, took ordinary human beings towards their *kartavya* (duty) and appealed to the lower status groups as well? Buddhism does not have too much *tam-jham* or celebration of big *utsavs*. There is a direct connect of the individual with the Divine. That entire thought system touches me deeply. Moreover, wherever Buddha went, the region witnessed prosperity. Even though China had a different belief system but Buddha has maintained his influence on China as well. Recently, I went to China and found that their government was introducing me to Buddhist elements of their culture with great pride. I got to know that China is making a film on Hiuen-Tsang. I took a pro-active role and wrote to those people saying that they should not forget the part about his stay in Gujarat.
>
> Hiuen-Tsang lived for a long time in the village where I was born. He has written about a hostel in that village where 1,000 student monks resided. After I became chief minister, I got the area excavated and found archeological evidence of things described by Hiuen-Tsang. This means Mahatma Buddha's philosophy would have had some influence on my ancestors.
>
> We found similar evidence at Devaki Mori near our village. During excavations, they found a gold box, which contains Bhagwan Buddha's ashes. These are lying in M.S. University at Baroda. It occurred to me that nowhere in the world can you hold the ashes of Lord Buddha in your hand. We alone have this treasure. Therefore, we are planning to construct a big temple of Lord Buddha here at the exact spot from where the box of ashes was excavated. It

won't be built by the government; instead we will motivate private bodies to do it. I want to create an institutional frame work in collaboration with Taiwan, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Singapore. Its architecture should also have a global appeal, not be limited to traditional Buddhist temples.

There is a widespread belief that *Bauddh dharma* influenced only the eastern part of India, but Gujarat provides ample proof that Buddhism was no less influential in the western regions of India. I feel this in my own *sanskars*. We have also found Buddhist caves in our region. The '*Khushboo Gujarat Ki*' ad campaign featuring Amitabh Bachchan shows those caves.

We signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sri Lankan government that they would bring Buddhist tourists from Sri Lanka and we would take Gujaratis for their Ram Trail. This is just the beginning of our attempts to develop the Buddhist heritage and build close links with Buddhist countries. We have recently developed closer friendship with Thailand by including direct flights from Ahmedabad to Bangkok. Forty per cent of India's tourist trade comes from Buddhist countries. But that mostly goes to eastern parts of India. I'm trying to do my bit to see that Gujarat starts getting its due share. We had also organised a World Buddhist Conference and a dialogue with Buddhist scholars at M.S. University, Baroda. In Junagarh, we also have King Ashoka's *shila lekh,* his edict, on a mammoth rock. The Ashok Chakra and the three lion symbol of the Government of India are directly connected to Gujarat.[1] I've not done any research on this subject but from my observations I am convinced that if someone were to carry out research, they will discover these aspects. Gujarat government has also made a film on the presence of King Ashoka in Gujarat.

Those who find it hard to accept the imprint of Mahatma Gandhi and Mahatma Buddha in Modi's life, should travel through the villages of Gujarat to see the impact of his work on the lives of the marginalised. Unlike most of his opponents among the "Left & secular" parties, Modi doesn't merely emote at the plight of the poor while keeping them haplessly dependent as captive vote banks. His detractors should listen to Modi's old and current associates, people he works closely with, to understand how the fountain spring behind all his development work is Bapu's talisman—deep commitment to strengthening the rights of the weakest so that they are able to break the shackles of poverty.

1 The rock carving is actually a four lion symbol but the fourth one is not visible in the image used by the Indian government.

Epilogue

Glimpses into My Personal Interactions with NaMo

Before I began my Gujarat study, I had heard endless stories about the numerous high-powered PR agencies Modi is supposed to have hired for self-marketing. Congress trolls constantly accused me on the social media of having been lured into Modi's camp by APCO, allegedly one of the key image builders of Modi. Since I never saw, or heard from anyone representing APCO even once, I was intrigued why this mysterious entity remained invisible to me. As per the information I gathered from Gujarat government officials, APCO's involvement is confined to handling the once-in-two-years Vibrant Gujarat Summit, which involves massive participation of foreign delegations. Other than that, APCO has no role in promoting either Gujarat or Modi.

The only PR agency of Gujarat government that I got to know is Delhi-based Mutual PR. I met them in January 2013, at the time of the Vibrant Gujarat Summit since they were coordinating the travel of guests from Delhi and other cities of India. However, since I let them know that I intended to pay for my own airfare and stay at my own cost during my visits to Gujarat, they have not bothered me with any further invitations. No one from Mutual PR offered me any information packages, not even official books published by the Gujarat government on tourism, education, and a host of other issues. Sadanand Dhume, who has written on Gujarat for American newspapers, told me that even he has never been wooed by any PR agency.

Whenever I needed any information, or old speeches of NaMo, I went through regular official channels—either the Information Department of the Gujarat government, or the Resident Commissioner of Gujarat in Delhi. They have been extremely courteous and helpful, but nothing came to me unsolicited, leave alone their trying to spoon-feed any information to me. In fact, like all Gujarat government officers, the Resident Commissioner and officials of Gujarat's information department carry such a heavy work-load with such a thin staff, that I always felt guilty making demands of them. Likewise, nobody from the BJP ever called me to give me feedback on what I had written or offer me any additional inputs.

I published the first six or seven articles on Narendra Modi without meeting or talking to him. While they created quite a stir in various

political circles, Modi himself neither contacted me directly nor tried to get in touch with me through others. He paid me no attention even when I attended his public meetings in Gujarat. He could see me videographing the proceedings, in the enclosure for journalists, but never even acknowledged my presence. At one such occasion in Bharuch, where I had gone to witness his *Krishi Utsav*, former NDTV anchor, Shiv Thukral, was also present. Shiv had read my articles and was very puzzled when I told him that I had never talked to Modi. As invariably happens, after Modi got off the stage, the journalists rushed to meet him in the CM's make shift anteroom. Thukral also went in for a chat and asked NaMo, "Have you not met Madhu Kishwar?" Modi blandly said, "No." Shiv asked in surprise, "How come? She has written so much about you! She is right here, why don't you call her?" Modi's response was something to this effect: "*Jab woh baat karna chahengi to zaroor baat karenge*" (I will meet her if and when she asks for a meeting).

Till I made a formal request for an interview, NaMo remained totally aloof. Even when we met for long interviews, he never ever commented on my articles about him that I had already published, let alone lavish praise or appreciation on me. The only time I got an indication that Modi had read my articles was when my friend Maneka Gandhi went to meet him. During the course of their conversation, they got talking about my Gujarat articles. Modi told Maneka to ask me whether I had seen the urgent fax messages sent by the Gujarat government to three neighbouring Congress-ruled states requesting additional forces to put down the post-Godhra riots.[1] This was the only time Modi volunteered some information on his own. His office supplied copies of those letters only when I sent in a request. The CM's office never sent me any information or documents other than what I asked for. Often they were too busy to send me even what I requested.

NaMo never invited me to attend any of his public rallies, or cover any event. Whatever events I attended, I did so on my own initiative. In fact, at times I complained to the Gujarat government's Department of Information that they should at least send me intimation about important public events of Modi so that I could plan my visits accordingly.

I am grateful that I received no pampering, or any special favours from any officials of the Gujarat government or any of its ministers or MLAs.

1 See chapter 12.

If I happened to be interviewing a BJP MLA late at night, I was offered the simple Gujarati meal the family had cooked for themselves. Similarly, if I happened to be in the midst of a long interview with a government officer at lunchtime, on a couple of occasions the concerned officer ordered some snacks in addition to tea. Only two officers formally invited me home for a meal with their family. Other than that, no one dangled any carrots, no one bothered to invite me for lavish lunches or dinners. I could do my work with full conviction because I did not feel the weight of any obligations.

But this cool treatment gave me an idea why Modi is so unpopular with journalists. In India media professionals have become used to outright bribes, wining and dining in five star hotels, special favours such as land allotments, freebies, expensive gifts, general pampering, and all manners of corrupt practices as their divine right. But Modi is a big spoiler of that game. I am told no journalists or media house can claim special favours from him; nor does he cultivate a special coterie that gets spoon-fed by him. Had I gone expecting, or wanting to be pampered, I would have abandoned this project long ago.

Even for claiming time, I had to battle with NaMo. He works 18 to 19 hours a day, 365 days a year and his schedule is packed and planned so far in advance, that he found it difficult to give me the kind of time I needed. I asked for a minimum of two-hour sessions each time, which was not easy for him to accommodate. There were times when I wrote angry mails thinking he was playing hard to get. For instance, one of my messages to his OSD read: "Please pass on this message to the Hon'ble CM. I do not wish to impose on his time. If Mr. Modi does not see any value in giving me time to interview him, I can do my study of Gujarat even without talking to him, as I have done so far. I don't want to be seen as pestering him or pleading for time. I am aware he is very very busy. Every minute of his day is precious. So it is not easy for him to take out time. If it is not worth his while, let us simply close this chapter. No hard feelings. From now on I am not going to be the one to ask."

I did get time for several sessions before and after this message but each interview had to be wrung out of him. I regretted very much that I had not started this study some years earlier when it would have been relatively easier to get his time even though he has always maintained the 18-19 hours a day work schedule. He has so much to say, and such rich experiences to share, it is a pity that none have bothered thus far to draw

out some of it by listening to him seriously, instead of asking the same old clichéd questions to flaunt their own "secular" credentials.

Among the noteworthy things about NaMo's work style and office, for the time being, I would like to share the following: He is meticulous about punctuality. Unlike most politicians, Modi doesn't keep people waiting or hanging around his office. If I got called at 4 p.m., I was ushered in within minutes of the appointed time. Except for one meeting in the secretariat, all our meetings took place in his office next to his residence. Unlike the offices and homes of most chief ministers, Modi's office doesn't have long or even short queues of people waiting to see him. Everyone gets called in within minutes of the appointed time. His office-cum-residence has minimum staff. After the security check, I only saw one or at most two persons around the CM's office. They serve water and tea without the visitor having to ask for it. There is a small secretariat attached to his office, but it is so quiet and so sparsely populated that you don't even hear any voices. It is the quietest office of a high-powered man I have ever seen.

Equally unusual is the fact that each person who is given an appointment gets uninterrupted one-on-one time with him. He doesn't allow phone calls during the duration of the entire meeting, unless there is an emergency. No official or secretary comes in the middle of his meetings. This is standard practice, whether he is meeting a poor fisherman, a school teacher, or one of his MLAs or officials. Each person who has gone to meet him has had a similar experience: for the time that Modi is with that person, be it five minutes or five hours, that person gets Modi's full attention.

The first time I met Narendra Modi, I happened to be very unwell with a bad cold and a splitting headache. Half way through the interview, I had to say, Narendrabhai, at least offer me a cup of tea. He apologised saying, "I am sorry, these things don't occur to me. This office is all about work." But he did order a cup of tea for me. A few days later, I jokingly told his private secretary, your CM is indeed funny, doesn't even offer a cup of *chai*! Since then I started getting a cup of my preferred black tea without asking every time we met. In fact, even his staff doesn't need reminding that I prefer black tea.

On one occasion, my interview time with Modi was fixed for 9 a.m. and I was to go straight from the airport to his office-cum-residence. A day before the meeting, I got a phone call from his OSD asking me what I would like for *nashta*. It came as a surprise, but I assumed that

NaMo was inviting me to have breakfast with him. When I reached his office, I was offered Gujarati delicacies, along with tea, in the reception room itself. Thinking I was going to have breakfast with him, I did not touch anything. But when I went in for the interview, there was no sign of breakfast. On being asked if I had taken my *nashta,* I said that I was under the impression that I am going to have breakfast with you. I am not the kind who would sit and eat in your reception area. His response was, "I am sorry, I am fasting on account of *chaturmaas.* In any case, I rarely have meals with people when they come to meet me. It wastes too much time."

It is standard practice for Modi's office to serve tea and/or snacks in the reception area for all visitors, while they wait for their appointment. This is done irrespective of the social status of the visitor. Even ordinary farmers or students who go and meet him are extended the same courtesy by his staff.[2] Even his old friends get treated the same way. He meets them very warmly but I am told he has never invited any one for dinner or lunch to his house. Since he works nonstop till early hours of the morning, there is no space for entertaining guests. At best, his friends get to share a light snack or fruit with him which he brings from home.

Had I been writing on any other politician, I am likely to have received numerous invitations for wining and dining. But with Modi I got the same treatment that any known or unknown person gets in his office.

One of the most memorable aspects of my 14-15 hours long conversations with Modi, spread over half a dozen meetings, is that I never once heard him say a bad word about anyone—not even those like Teesta Setalvad or Tarun Tejpal—who have hounded him for years. The most he said was, "I don't understand why these people went after me like that. It really hurts. I never did anything to harm them." I did not expect this sort of restraint from a man who appears so combative when electioneering.

Most people who know him personally say that he is an extremely soft hearted person, totally unlike the macho fighter persona he puts on in campaign meetings. Even when talking to me about the endless fire ordeals he went through and the ignominies hurled on him, he never

2 For an account of the reception given to an unknown Muslim student from Patna, who sought an appointment with NaMo through Twitter read: Sultan Alimuddin, "My Tweet to Narendra Modi," posted at *Manushi* website, *Web.* http://www.manushi.in/articles.php?articleId=1750#.Uw3cNPSSxJM.

once sounded agitated, self pitying or angry. By all accounts he never raises his voice but lights up when talking about all the innovations he has introduced in Gujarat. He says his life's motto is to counter negativity with positive actions, not by dwelling on the harm people are causing him. As he often says in his public meetings, "The more *keechad* you throw at me, the more will the Lotus (BJP symbol) bloom. When people throw stones at me, I use them to build bridges or ladders to reach out or climb high."

He did not bad mouth even Congress leaders, including one of his main tormentors, Ahmed Patel, who has been one of the masterminds behind Modi's persecution. In fact, NaMo talked warmly about the time when he and Patel had such a cordial friendship that Patel would often invite Modi to his house in Delhi to share Gujarati meals. Likewise, I did not hear a bad word about Keshubhai or any of the Delhi leaders who have done their best to block his emergence as BJP's PM candidate. In fact, Modi told me clearly, "You will never get me to talk about the internal affairs of BJP or any of my colleagues in the party. I know journalists don't like it. But I am not going to change this instrinsic aspect of my personality."

Since, it has been my established practice as the editor of Manushi, to send who ever I have interviewed the full text of what I intend to publish in that person's name, I asked NaMo to read the full translation of my long video-recorded conversations with him in order to check the manuscript for accuracy. His response was, "If I check it, what you publish becomes my responsibility. I would rather it remain your responsibility. I don't believe in interfering in other people's work."

The unspoken message was, 'Don't expect me to feel obliged if you write well about me, just as I won't hold it against you if you write foul things about me. You do your job, as you think fit, I am doing mine. No obligation on either side.'

Acknowledgements

This book[1] would never have been written had my study of Gujarat not offered me a wealth of evidence that far from being guilty of engineering riots in 2002, far from being anti-minorities, Narendra Modi actually did all in his power to quell the violence and bridge the communal and caste divides which were tearing Gujarat asunder. The clear exoneration of Narendra Modi in the meticulous report prepared by the Supreme Court appointed SIT lent further strength to what I discovered from my own study of post Godhra Gujarat. The country is indebted to the SIT team for having resisted all manners of political pressures, and even vilification, with a view to forcing them to tailor-fit the report to the Congress Party's requirements.

This book would never have been written had Sonia Congress and its comrades-in-arms in the Communist parties, especially the CPM, not deployed their best political brains to devise the most sinister strategies to fabricate a whole demonology around Narendra Modi.

This book would never have been written if the Congress and its allies had the courage and integrity to fight Modi politically on genuine issues, rather than using hirelings for destroying their prime challenger through character assassination and trial by innuendo with the single-minded aim of toppling his government in Gujarat and prevent his rise to power at the Centre.

This book would have never been written if one had not seen the rhetoric of "secularism" being used as a mask to cover mafia operations and all manner of crimes by the leading politicians and public figures of India; had political parties claiming to be "secular" not employed their choicest stalwarts to spew venom against Modi as their primary occupation for the last 12 years.

This book would never have been written if the Congress-CPM combine had not given their game away by making common cause with the worst elements of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal, as well as devious elements within the BJP and the RSS, to let loose a tsunami of

1 This book is a continuation of the *Modinama* series of articles I published on the *Manushi* website (www.manushi.in) after my first few visits to Gujarat. This is work-in-progress and will soon be followed by at least one, if not two more books on Gujarat under Modi's regime.

hate against a man who had done them no harm. The fact that they felt threatened by Modi's determination to improve the quality of governance and bridge the divide between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians betrayed the true character of their politics and made it imperative that this game be exposed.

I would not have felt compelled to undertake this study of post-2002 Gujarat if the most "eminent" among print media and TV journalists not become brazen megaphones of the smear campaign against Modi engineered by the Congress-CPM combine; if the 24x7 TV news channels had not made it possible for ordinary citizens to see how political discourse is distorted and partisan agendas made respectable; if the obsessive nature of hate chants by hysterical TV anchors for the last 12 years not created widespread revulsion and forced me to probe into the wellsprings of their paranoia.

I would never have abandoned all my other work and made the study of post-2002 Gujarat the primary focus of my attention, if numerous proxies of the Congress Party among NGOs and activists claiming to be defenders of human rights, had not gone overboard in building a sinister phobic politics around the Gujarat chief minister by mesmerising themselves into believing that by throwing daily muck at Modi, they could persuade everyone in India that no greater evil than Narendra Modi existed on the face of the earth. They have destroyed the credibility of human rights activism by their willingness to act as foot soldiers of vile politicians.

I would not have taken on this work with such fierce determination, if I had not seen prominent voices within the academic establishment become willing accomplices in subverting democracy through a systematic misinformation campaign and outright lies under the pretense of fighting "communalism". To the best of my knowledge, none of the professional baiters of Modi spent any time researching in Gujarat; many did not even set foot in the state and yet wrote and spoke with amazing zeal and conviction against Modi. Some of them did this knowingly, while others seem to have acted under pressure of being politically correct, in order to safeguard their career prospects with those who control access to research funds, invitations to international conferences, and placement in prestigious universities.

My task was made harder by the fact that many of them are my old friends and colleagues. But they shunned and slandered me as though by going against their view of things, I had committed heinous crimes.

On the positive side:

This book could be written only because NaMo built an impressive track record of steadfast efforts to remain anchored in positive energy, despite being made an international hate object.

I am deeply indebted to all those in Gujarat who shared their insights and experiences of post-2002 Gujarat with me. This includes farmers, businessmen, politicians, government officers, students, journalists, teachers, lawyers, doctors, houseives, old friends and associates of Narendra Modi. Many of them have been quoted in this volume and others will get named as I share parts of their recorded interviews in subsequent volumes. But Bapu Sadat Ali, Chaitanya Patel and his father Chandrakant Patel of district Bharuch, Prof. Gunvant Shah and Piyush Patel of Baroda; Brijeshh Patel, Mukul Jani, Jatin Sanghhani and Kiritbhai of Rajkot; Divyakant, Sirajbhai and Wahabbhai of Junagarh; Ahmedbhai Sindhi of Godhra, Yousafbhai of Gir village, Hussainbhai of Drub village near Mundra port, Miyan Hussain of Dordo, Vishnu Pandya and Kishorebhai Makwana of Ahmedabad—deserve special mention because their formal and informal conversations proved extremely valuable for my work.

I am also grateful to various officers of Gujarat government who gave me time from their hectic schedules to share their personal experiences of having worked with NaMo.

I would also like to record my appreciation to *www.gujaratriots.com* for providing a valuable reckoner on the Gujarat riots. I had, at first, dismissed this blog as a mere propaganda tract because of its charged emotional tone. But once I started counter-checking the facts from the links it had provided to contemporary newspaper reports, I felt grateful for the enormous effort this young student (who prefers to remain anonymous) had put in single-handedly to collate and analyse contemporary news reports to bring out the truth behind Gujarat riots in the public domain.

I also take this occasion to thank the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), for leaving me free to do my study of post-2002 Gujarat despite the virulent hostility of many of my colleagues. This is especially remarkable considering that CSDS has, from the start, been a citadel of anti-Modi campaigns. The founders of CSDS have left a strong legacy of intellectual freedom that allowed me the space to survive at the Centre despite my politically-unfashionable views on this and numerous other subjects.

My special thanks to my oldest colleague, Prabha Tiwari, who has been a pillar of strength and support for me for the last 20 years. through various

highs and lows. She, along with Anugraha, Anantha, Amita, Aaina, Anurag, Nibedita, Yogesh, and several other new and old Manushi friends helped me through various stages of this manuscript by transcribing countless hours of video recordings from my field trips in Gujarat, helping me sift through numerous documents, typed or proofread endless revisions of these chapters. This book would have taken much longer to take shape without their help.

I owe special thanks to my friend and colleague, Babul for his invaluable help with this book. I know he hates being thanked but I cannot help but say, what a great privilege it is to have him as a sounding board and honest critic from the very early days of Manushi.

As always, my deepest debt of gratitude is to my parents. They gave me unconditional support and love no matter how much I went against some of their cherished beliefs; they stood by me even when I made blunders that caused them enormous pain. They respected my desire to learn from my own mistakes rather than live through received wisdom; they nurtured in me love of truth and justice. I need several life times to repay their debt.

Finally, this book could not have been written if, at a very early age, I had not found an intellectual and moral anchor in Mahatma Gandhi who taught me that '*Satya* and *Ahinsa*' (Truth and Non-Violence) are far better guides to judge the worth of any political action or idea than high-sounding ideologies. I am indebted to Bapu for giving me the strength to avoid being swayed by politically fashionable currents, to stay steadfast in the face of intellectual terror of those who claim monopoly in defining political correctness, to remain undeterred by slander, and stand alone when necessary.

About the Author

Madhu Purnima Kishwar is a Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Director Indic Studies Project at CSDS.

She is also the founder editor of *Manushi - A Journal about Women and Society,* which was started in 1978. The print edition of *Manushi* gave way to online edition in 2008. (See www.manushi.in).

She is also the founder President of **Manushi Sangathan**, an organization working for democratic reforms that promote greater social justice and strengthen human rights of all, especially women. Kishwar prefers to keep her work with *Manushi* as a "labour of love" rather than a professional engagement. **Manushi** is managed by a non-profit Trust**.**

Both her work at CSDS as well as her labour of love with **Manushi** is aimed at finding effective solutions for various economic, political and social problems confronting our society through patient study, non-partisan approach, live interaction with the concerned people and informed activism. She is known to avoid the trap of 'isms' and prefers to anchor her politics in truth, compassion and non-violence.

She has authored/edited the following books:

- *Zealous Reformers, Deadly Laws,* Sage Publishers, (2008).
- *Deepening Democracy: Challenges of Governance and Globalization in India***,** Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005.
- *Off the Beaten Track: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women***,** Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.
- *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998. Translated into Hindi under the title *Rashtravaad Ki Chaakri Mein Dharma*, Vani Prakshan, 2005.
- *(Ed) The Dilemma and Other Stories* by Vijaydan Detha, Manushi Prakashan, 1997.
- *Gandhi and Women,* Manushi Prakashan, New Delhi, 1986. (Also published in Telugu).
- *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi.* (Co-edited with Ruth Vanita), Zed Books, London, 1984.
- *Women Bhakta Poets,* Lives and Poetry of Women Mystics in India from 6th to 17th Century (Co-edited with Ruth Vanita), Manushi Prakashan, New Delhi, 1989.

The author can be reached at: madhukishwar@manushi.in or madhukishwar@csds.in

This book gives objective facts back their proper central place in our political life... The enormous amount of important research that went into this effort demands that all those who care about the well-being of India's people and healthy inter-community relations should read it carefully and weigh its conclusions fairly...

Thus far, we have heard the voices of those who, in condemning Modi, claim to speak on behalf of Gujarati Muslims. The value of Kishwar's narrative is that she has let Muslims speak for themselves by quoting extensively from her video-recorded interviews with both rural and urban Muslims.

An honest understanding of this phase of contemporary history is vital for the health of democracy and amicable inter-community relations in India.

-Salim Khan, Script writer & columnist

The manner in which the author has gone about talking to officials and people in detail, about the functioning of the Gujarat government under Modi; her visits to various parts of Gujarat to know about the conditions prevailing in the state; her unbiased and masterly analyses of the material she gathered through her tireless work, makes this book almost a thesis.

But unlike an academic thesis, the book makes absorbing reading; apart from being an irrefutable answer to the prejudiced critics of Modi, it is a page-turner too.

-Cho Ramaswamy, Editor, *Thuglak*

Madhu Purnima Kishwar is Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Director Indic Studies Project at CSDS. She is the founder editor of *Manushi - A Journal About Women and Society* and founder president of Manushi Sangathan, an organisation committed to strengthening women's rights and democratic rights in India.

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